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A Content Analysis of Teacher Perceptions of the Implementation of Small Learning Communities at a High School

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A Content Analysis on Teacher Perceptions of the Implementation of Small Learning Communities at a High School

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Education
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Keywords:
Educational change, educational reform, small schools, school within a school

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation work to my family and many friends. I very thankful and grateful to my loving parents, Ed and Nancy Tonry whose words of encouragement and push for tenacity ring in my ears. To my wonderful husband, Andres M. Gonzalez, whose continuous encouragement and support has brought me to the finish line. I cannot thank my family enough, I will always appreciate all that you have done for me.
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Abstract

Educational reform is vital to meet the educational, social, and personal needs of an ever-changing student population. Many attempts at educational reform have been made over the past century. A number of reforms were originated and directed by policy at the Federal, State and regional levels, and others were developed at the district or school level. Demands for educational change are ever-present, and the acceptance of or resistance to change continues to be a topic of discussion and focus of research.

The purpose of this study was to understand change in the implementation of small learning communities (SLCs) at a single high school by examining six years of grade level SLC meeting minutes to explore how the implementation of SLCs influenced teacher collegiality, student-teacher relationships, and instructional practices related to improving student academic outcomes.

The primary research question was: How do teachers at a high school focus their efforts to improve student achievement through SLC reform? Three sub-questions guided exploration of the primary question:

1. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher collegiality in their SLC meetings?
2. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher-student relationships in their SLC meetings?
3. In what ways did teachers discuss instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance in their SLC meetings?

The literature review for this study included an overview of the historical perspective on educational change and reform. As a school-based practitioner, the researcher experienced
educational change more locally than globally, so various forms of local organizational change were examined, including charter schools, school-within-a-school, and SLCs. More specifically, literature was explored in relation to SLCs and their influence on collegiality, relationships, and improved student academic performance.

This was a case study examining one depository of documents. Qualitative content analysis was used to examine the SLC meeting minutes, in relation to three categories of review: teacher collegiality, teacher-student relationships, and instructional strategies and practices.

How a reform gets implemented through ordinary, everyday practices is not always clear. In the case school it was expected that teachers would meet regularly in their SLCs, talk about their students and their instructional practices, and make decisions about what is best practice to support student academic success. Teachers’ reactions to the District’s announcements of the implementation of other reform initiatives on top of the SLC initiative were often less than supportive. Conversations that gained momentum in SLC meetings might be side-stepped or delayed as teachers worked through the implications of a new District initiative, thus delaying the implementation of the SLC model.

Initially, it appeared that the three major themes – teacher collegiality, teacher-student relationships, and instructional practices – would drive the process, dialogue, and decisions of the SLCs. Findings of the study suggest that the process, dialogue, and decisions of the SLCs shaped the three major themes and their interactions, providing greater insight into how all three themes resulted in teacher perspectives, decisions, and actions aimed at influencing student achievement.

This study offered valuable insights into one aspect of implementation – the nature of the process, dialogue, and decisions that emerge in conversations in SLC meetings and their influence on teachers’ perspectives, decisions, and actions aimed at influencing student achievement.
Chapter One

Introduction

Educational reform is vital to meet the educational, social, and personal needs of an ever-changing student population. Many attempts at educational reform have been made over the past century. A number of the reforms were originated and directed by policy at the Federal, State and regional levels, and others were developed at the school level. Demands for educational change are ever-present, and the acceptance of or resistance to change has been the topic of many educational leaders from teachers, principals, and superintendents to presidents of universities (Smith, 2008). Identifying the factors that cause resistance to educational reforms is crucial to ensure long-term success.

During the period after World War II, the study of educational change focused on the growth of higher education and the building of hundreds of public universities throughout the nation (Lieberman, 2005). During the 1950s educational reform was aimed at changing the curriculum within schools. These reforms were predicated on mounting parental pressure, based on a view of education as the gateway to a better future for children and parents (Lieberman, 2005).

The development of the Research, Development and Diffusion (RD&D) model of Clark and Guba (1965) was one of the first business change models used in education. The RD&D model examined various processes of diffusion and adoption of technical innovations. In this model, change was seen as occurring with adoption of the innovation. The Civil Rights Movement
coincided with the sweeping curriculum and technological reform efforts entrenched in the War on Poverty and equality (Lieberman, 2005).

A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform (1983) spurred educational change and reform in the 1980s. The report was perceived as a call to action, proposing that what was wrong with American schools could be best fixed by top-down mandates at the State level aimed at improving student academic achievement. The result was higher graduation requirements, standardized curriculum, increased testing of students, and increased certification requirements for teachers.

Under President Clinton Goals 2000: The Educate American Act (1994) focused on formalizing national standards and assessment systems to measure educational outcomes. The reauthorization of ESEA was included under Goals 2000 and required states and local school districts to develop school improvement plans and be held accountable for achievement of performance standards (Goertz, 2001).

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the reauthorization of ESEA, renamed as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 or NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). NCLB was a sweeping comprehensive school reform. The goal of NCLB was for all students to meet state academic and achievement standards. States were required to develop standards for reading mathematics and to document student progress on achieving adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward proficiency in the standards, both for the school as a whole and for subgroups (racial, ethnic, gender, and non-English proficient). Sanctions against schools failing to achieve AYP ranged from being placed on a “needs improvement” list to being subject to closure, conversion to a charter school, or being taken over by the State.
By 2010, NCLB, once viewed as a one-size-fits-all approach, was perceived as not meeting the educational needs of all students. In March 2010 the U.S. Department of Education released President Obama’s *A Blueprint for Reform* for the reauthorization of ESEA. The blueprint focused on college readiness, teacher professional development, equity, the Race to the Top competitive grant program, and innovation. Race to the Top funding influenced teacher evaluation, alternative pathways to the teaching profession, development of public charter schools, and additional options for State intervention into schools that perform poorly (Manna, 2010).

The multiple reauthorizations of ESEA serve as a prime example of how educational change and reform have evolved over the past sixty years. Of increasing interest has been the movement to smaller schools contexts (e.g., schools within schools, small learning communities) and schools of choice like charter schools.

Charter schools are public schools that are granted permission to operate by the local school district. The charter schools receive public funds to operate and function. They are a method to offer students and parents increased educational choices within the public school system. A school-within-a-school is a separate autonomous unit that plans and runs its own programs within a current school. Teachers and students are part of the school-within-a-school by choice. Small Learning Communities (SLCs) are described as any separately defined, individualized learning unit within a larger school setting. Students and teachers are scheduled together and frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most or all of their classes (Sammon, 2000). SLCs encompass elements of organization around houses or career academies, while intensifying focus on learning and the learner (Oxley, 2005).

In 2001, the United States Department of Education (USDOE) recognized the need for educational reform in secondary education. Based on this need the USDOE awarded grants to
schools and school districts to support the implementation of small learning communities (SLCs) and activities to improve student academic achievement. “SLCs include structures such as freshman academies, multi-grade academies organized around career interests or other themes, ‘houses’ in which small groups of students remain together throughout high school, and autonomous schools-within-a-school, as well as personalization strategies, such as student advisories, family advocate systems, and mentoring programs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The intent of these small learning communities is to provide a more personal learning environment where teachers collaborate to build a more relevant and rigorous curriculum that meets students’ academic and personal needs.

**Context of the Study**

In 2002, the Pinellas County School Board applied for and was awarded one of the United States Department of Education grants to promote the implementation of SLCs in qualified schools. The Pinellas County Schools District in Florida consists of 146 schools that currently serve about 104,780 students Pre-K through 12th grade. There are 18 high schools with an enrollment of 29,830 in grades 9-12. The demographic breakdown of the district during 2011-2012 (the last year of data reviewed for the study) and 2014-2015 (the year data analysis was completed) shows that the district student population has been relatively stable:
### Table 1

*Comparison of Student Demographics 2011-2012 and 2014-2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>58.7%</td>
<td>57.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiracial</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 2004, Reagan High School (RHS) in St. Petersburg, Florida was a recipient of a portion of the monies from this grant. The grant monies supported the research, planning, and implementation of SLCs at RHS. The principal at the time utilized the grant monies to decentralize a large school into smaller, more personalized houses or SLCs. The SLCs were built around themes that the students chose to join based on interest. The SLC themes were infused into the curriculum of the students’ courses. The SLCs allowed the teachers to build relationships with the students, thus allowing them to better meet the students’ academic and personal needs. The SLCs also supported teacher collegiality. This collegiality afforded the teachers the opportunity to learn and grow from each other’s knowledge and educational background. The implementation of SLCs at RHS was viewed as a positive influence for student and teacher academic success.

### Statement of the Problem

Adoption of educational reform is a difficult task, and tough choices must be made in order for successful implementation to happen at the school level. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the
principal is determining how to develop a guiding vision and create a school culture that supports the new paradigm of change. Leadership “is a complex balance of conflicting forces and tension” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p. xii). “Change is ubiquitous and relentless, forcing on us at every turn. At the same time, the secret of growth and development is learning how to contend with the forces of change – turning positive forces to our advantage, while blunting negative ones” (Fullan, 1993, p. vii).

SLCs are a form of educational reform. With any reform comes challenges that can either derail the reform process or help the school grow and learn through the process. Ensuring the faculty, staff, and students are forging forward with the reform is not always a smooth transition, and this is where Fullan’s perspective that “turning positive forces to our advantage, while blunting negative ones” is vital and key to the success of the reform.

**Conceptual Framework**

Conceptual frameworks are defined by Miles and Huberman (1984, p. 33) as “the current version of the researcher’s map of the territory being investigated.” Often conceptual frameworks continue to evolve as the research evolves. The graphic representation that follows represents the initial conceptual framework that guided the thought process behind the study. The overarching guiding focus of the study is educational reform, more specifically reform through SLCs. Three areas that research and change literature focused on in determining the success or failure of SLCs are teacher collegiality, student-teacher relationships, and instructional practice. These three factors are believed to contribute to sustaining processes, dialogue, and decision making that support teachers’ efforts to improve student achievement.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand change in the implementation of SLCs at a single high school located in Pinellas County, Florida by examining six years of grade level SLC meeting minutes to explore how the implementation of SLCs influenced teacher collegiality, student-teacher relationships, and instructional practices related to improving student academic outcomes.

![Diagram of the conceptual framework of the study.](image)

*Figure 1. Representation of the conceptual framework of the study.*

The primary research question was: How do teachers at a high school focus their efforts to improve student achievement through SLC reform? Three sub-questions guided exploration of the primary question:

1. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher collegiality in their SLC meetings?
2. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher-student relationships in their SLC meetings?
3. In what ways did teachers discuss instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance in their SLC meetings?

**Research Design**

This is a case study examining one depository of documents. While documents are more commonly used as a supplemental data source in case studies, “qualitative researchers are turning to documents as their primary source of data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 57). Qualitative content analysis was used to examine the SLC meeting minutes, specifically in relation to three predetermined categories of review based on the three sub-questions: teacher collegiality, teacher-student relationships, and instructional strategies and practices.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2003) defined content analysis as a “research technique for the objective, systematic, and qualitative description of the manifest content of communication. The raw material for content analysis can be any type of document or other communication medium” (p. 278).

In conducting content analysis the researcher is seeking to make “replicable and valid inferences from data to their context, with the purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to actions” (Elo & Kyngas, 2008, p. 108). Qualitative content analysis emphasizes an integrated view of text and their specific contexts, going “beyond merely counting words or extracting objective content from texts to examine meanings, themes and patterns that may be manifest or latent in a particular text. It allows researchers to understand social reality in a subjective but scientific manner” (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009, p. 1).

It was hoped that this study would provide insight for future educational change endeavors like SLCs which rely heavily on teacher engagement and collaboration, as well as their
commitment to making changes in their instructional practice and relationships with students and each other in order to improve students’ academic performance. It was also hoped that the study would provide insight into the decision making process in collaborative groupings like SLCs in schools.

**Importance of the Study**

Existing research in this area focuses on qualitative reports of the drivers and preventers of implementing educational reform as it relates to SLCs. This study examines more closely the process of implementing SLCs from the point of view of those experiencing the change at a high school. As this analysis is derived directly from SLC grade level meeting minutes, it offers a firsthand account of the impact of SLC implementation on teachers, students, and the community. As such the study may inform similar educational reform initiatives at the high school level.

**Limitations**

There are three important limitations to this study. First, the principle researcher is the current principal at OHS and served in an administrative capacity during the reform process. It is in the best interest of the researcher to take every precaution possible to alleviate all concerns expressed by the teachers involved. Second, teachers recorded the grade level SLC meeting minutes that were utilized in the content analysis. The meetings were not digitally recorded so the likelihood that the minutes are not as accurate as possible is a limitation. Third, as a former participant in the process, I am relying on my interactions and recollections of the meetings to assist in the content analysis and provide a personal perspective outside of the meeting minutes.
Definitions

The following terms are used in this study:

*Charter Schools:* nonsectarian public schools of choice that operate with freedom from many of the regulations that apply to traditional public schools (U.S. Department of Education website).

*Content Analysis:* “an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification” (Mayring, 2000, p. 2).

*Instructional Change:* changes in teachers’ instructional practices, including behaviors, actions, interactions with students, activities, and opportunities provided to students (Parise & Spillane, 2010).

*Reform:* a movement, a plan, or program that attempts to bring about change (Smith, 2008).

*School-within-a-School:* a separate and autonomous unit formally authorized by the board of education and/or superintendent. It plans and runs its own program, has its own staff and students, and receives its own separate budget (Raywid, 1995, p. 21).

*SLC:* a form of school structure that is increasingly common in secondary schools to subdivide large school populations into smaller, autonomous groups of students and teachers (Smith, 2008).

*Student achievement:* the status of subject-matter knowledge, understandings, and skills at one point in time, most commonly measured by a standardized test (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2011).
Student-teacher relationships: caring, authentic connections, support and interdependence between students and teachers in a learning environment (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012).

Teacher collegiality: teachers working together to collaboratively solve problems of practice as a community of learners to foster school-wide collaboration and conversation (Harris & Anthony, 2001).

Researcher Educational Background and Perspective

I have been in the educational arena for 20 years and currently work as the principal of OHS. Previously, I worked directly with the RHS principal as the assistant principal for curriculum and was very involved and entrenched in the transformation process at that school. When the RHS principal (who was very instrumental in the transformation and implementation of SLCs at RHS) was transferred to Owl High School (OHS) in the same school district, I was able to transfer schools with him. As an experienced educator who has seen various educational reform efforts throughout her tenure in the educational field, one factor that I have observed that remains constant is the need to educate and to develop buy-in from the faculty and staff of the school. In other words, I believe that without buy-in from the faculty and staff, any educational reform effort will not be successful.

With each experience, I have had with school or district reform I have gained more knowledge and seen more actions and behaviors, which have led me to believe that there must be reform within education in order to meet the ever-changing demands of the students and society. I have a strong belief that the faculty, staff, and administration have to develop buy-in and be a part of the reform process in order for change to be effective. With these beliefs guiding my research, I decided to conduct a qualitative content analysis to determine how teachers at OHS identified with the implementation of grade level SLCs, and how SLCs influenced teacher
collegiality, student teacher relationships, and instructional practices to improve student academic outcomes.

Summary

This study examined how SLCs influenced teacher collegiality, student-teacher relationships, and instructional practices at OHS. Chapter 1 presents the background of the study, statement of the problem and purpose of the study, research design and limitations, importance of the study, definitions, and researcher perspective. Chapter 2 provides a review of relevant literature including a historical perspective of educational change and reform, various forms of educational reform, and SLCs as they relate to collegiality, teacher-student relationships, and instructional practices to improve student academic performance. Various forms of local organizational changes are examined, particularly charter schools, school-within-a-school, and SLCs. Chapter 3 presents the methodology undertaken and the rationale for its appropriateness for the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes and discusses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research and implications for practice.
Chapter Two

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to explore one small learning community (SLC), which became an important element of educational change at a high school. Specifically, this study examined how the teachers at Owl High School (OHS) focused their efforts to improve student achievement through SLC reform. Through the study the researcher sought to understand how the SLCs influenced teacher collegiality, teacher-student relationships, and student academic performance.

Studies of educational change have produced a multitude of diverse and often contradictory findings. Berman (1981) suggests inconsistent research findings may reflect educational reality, not inadequate methodology. Educational change has been exposed as complex through empirical studies and has consistently challenged the possibility of simple, comparable generalizations.

The literature review for this study provides first an overview of the historical perspective of educational change and reform. As a school-based practitioner, I observe educational change more locally rather than globally. Thus, the various forms of local organizational change examined were charter schools, school-within-a-school, and SLC’s. More specifically, literature was explored in relation to SLC’s and their influence on collegiality, relationships, and improved student academic performance.
Historical Perspectives on Educational Change and Reform

The process of whole-school reform is complex (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Fullan & Miles, 1992; Kirby, Berends, & Naftel, 2001), and creating a context that supports change is critical. The terms educational change and educational reform are similar but are not used interchangeably. Educational reform is a movement, a plan, or program that attempts to bring about change. Educational change is the byproduct of the reform (Smith, 2008). Both of the terms refer to an alteration to the educational environment.

To gain a solid foundation to explore educational change and reform, we must first explore the historical perspective on change. During the period after World War II, a study of educational change emerged that focused on the growth of higher education and the building of hundreds of public universities throughout the nation (Lieberman, 2005). The G.I. Bill afforded many veterans the opportunity to attend college after the war, causing colleges and universities to expand at a rapid rate. This rapid growth spurred growth in technology and scientific discoveries (Lieberman, 2005), and this educational growth was seen as a vital component in the United States winning the war. Due to successful educational growth, federal aid was directed towards education to improve schools. “Education was increasingly seen as critical, not only to the well-being of the post-war industrial society, but as a major component of the competition for supremacy with the Soviet Union” (Lieberman, 2005, p.2).

During the 1950s educational reform was aimed at changing the curriculum within schools. The launching of Sputnik in 1957 seemed to increase U.S. fear that it was losing the Cold War technology and military races. Pressure from multiple fronts focused on the need for trained teachers, engineers, and students in America’s K-12 schools. The National Defense Education Act of 1958 and the National Science Foundation directed their focus on the classroom and
curriculum development (Goodlad & Klein, 1970), particularly in the areas of mathematics, science, and modern foreign languages. This was the first time that large amounts of federal funds were being appropriated to influence curriculum for school improvement. In the same time frame James Conant’s *The American High School Today* (1959) focused attention at the secondary level on increased rigor and an academic core of English, mathematics, science, and social sciences.

The Research, Development and Diffusion (RD&D) model of Clark and Guba (1965) was one of the first change models that was used in the business industry and applied to the educational arena. The model assumes that knowledge, produced by research, can be converted into usable form during its development, spread to users during diffusion, and finally put into practice during the adoption stage. The RD&D model examined various processes of diffusion and adoption of technical innovations. In this model, research change was seen as occurring with adoption of the innovation. Rogers and Shoemaker (1971) analyzed 1,500 diffusion studies and concluded that individuals adopted innovations at different rates and could be classified along a continuum from early adopters through late adopters. Havelock (1973) along with Lippit, Lippit, and Lippitt (1978) claimed that in order to ensure adoption, the use of a consultant, as a change agent to identify and overcome resistance and help facilitate change, might be useful.

Early approaches to educational change borrowed heavily from theories derived from innovation in non-educational settings, in particular, the RD&D model of change. Generally, such approaches could best be described as top down. Berman (1981) states that early approaches to planned educational change were guided by four basic assumptions reflective of the RD&D model. These assumptions were:

1. School problems were waiting for a technical fix; that is, better products and methods would be used only if teachers were made aware of their existence.
2. Innovations were seen as fixed and constant treatments; thus, whatever the developer conceived would be faithfully introduced and diffused unaltered throughout a school.

3. Adoption was equivalent to implementation; hence, the major focus was on getting schools to agree to use the innovative practice and then leaving them to carry out the agreement.

4. Schools operated as rational bureaucracies (that is, schools had a set of policies and actions geared to attaining their goals). The need for change was determined by the gaps between current conditions and desired performances, which were ascertained through deliberate searches to find changes that would improve goal attainment. (Berman, 1981, p. 260)

Goodlad and Klein (1970), Sarason (1971), and Gross, Giacquinta, and Berstine (1971) indicated in their studies that the four assumptions Berman suggested were not warranted. These studies noted that many educational innovation strategies based on the RD&D model failed to bring sustained change. Berman (1981) suggested inconsistent research findings on the outcomes and success of change efforts may reflect educational reality, not inadequate methodology. Educational change is complex; empirical studies such as these, according to Berman, challenge the possibility of simple, comparable generalizations.

Promoting change through the RD&D model was proving a more complicated process than simply providing technically sound information or products to schools and then trusting in their subsequent adoption.

The Civil Rights Movement coincided with the sweeping curriculum and technological reform efforts spawned in response to Sputnik. During this time American society was entrenched in the War on Poverty and equality (Lieberman, 2005). We were becoming aware of the gross
“inequities that existed in housing, employment, and schools, as well as in the daily life of ordinary black citizens” (Lieberman, 2005, p. 3). The landmark decision made by the Supreme Court in the case of Brown v. Board of Education (1954) concluded that schools that were segregated racially were inherently unequal. Segregated schools were seen as generating feelings of inferiority that affect children’s motivation to learn (Sowell, 1984).

In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) supplied monies for a variety of educational programs to support equity and school improvement. It was perceived as the most expansive federal education bill ever passed to date on April 9, 1965, as a part of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty.” The bill included five areas of focus, the most notable being Title I, aimed at compensatory programs to enhance the education of children from low income families. ESEA evolved through a series of reauthorizations and in 2002 was reauthorized as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). In 2010, ESEA was reauthorized again by President Obama as the A Blueprint for Reform (U.S. Department of Education).

Research conducted during this time period revealed that schools are complex social systems and the inherent difficulties associated with trying to change them. For example, ESEA was the catalyst for various educational studies. Such large-scale studies brought attention for the first time to looking at schools as cultures, with their own particular contexts, providing new ways to understand teachers, leadership, and the problems of change. Researchers now began to look inside the school trying to assess how new curricular pedagogical and organizational ideas were organized, how teachers worked with their students and with each other, and what the role of leadership was. (Lieberman, 2005, pp. 3-4)
Sarason linked the external pressures of society to the powerful norms internal to the school’s teaching in his book, *The Culture of the School and the Problems of Change* (1971). Schools are cultures, and changing a culture is far more complicated than simplistically assuming introducing new curricula or new pedagogical techniques will result in school-wide adoption (Sarason, 1971).

In the 1970’s, educational reform researchers focused on studying innovations in curriculum, pedagogy, and organization. “Studies focused on the links between innovative ideas and the organizational processes that served as barriers to or supports for these changes” (Lieberman, 2005, p. 5). From the studies, many questions arose:

1. Is the school committed to change or just going through the motions?
2. Are the innovations being created applicable to schools?
3. Is there a lack of understanding of roles during the change process?

Stemming from investigations into federal change agent policies carried out by the Rand Corporation in 1974-1975, Berman and McLaughlin (1978) concluded that innovations underwent considerable change during implementation so as to meet the needs of local adopters. The Rand Change Agent Study released in 1978 was a major study that shifted the educational fields’ perspective on schools, innovation, and change (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). The Rand study explored “the effects of public policy on educational change conceived in the late 1960s and implemented in the early 1970s, revealed that implementation—the process whereby a school actually makes changes—was the significant problem” (Lieberman, 2005, p.5). The study identified new ways of looking at educational improvement from the perspectives of Federal policy makers, local schools, and their communities (Lieberman, 2005). The Rand Change Agent Study determined changing schools was a long-term process, which involved an understanding of the
problem and the local culture of the individual schools and their teachers. Teachers and principals changed their practices and ideas depending on contextual conditions (Berman & McLaughlin, 1978). “This large scale study provided important data, information and interpretation essential to the growing understanding of the process as well as the content of educational change” (Lieberman, 2005, p.6).

In 1983, The National Commission on Excellence in Education released its report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report criticized America’s educational performance and described “a rising tide of mediocrity” that would be seen as an “act of war” if some external power had imposed the American educational system on the U.S. The Commission recommended strengthening graduation requirements and adopting higher measurable standards for academic performance, increasing the amount of time students spend engaged in learning, and strengthening the teaching profession through enhanced preparation and professional growth.

*A Nation at Risk* spurred educational change and reform in the 1980s. Before *A Nation at Risk*, educators viewed reform as a singular event. Change after *A National at Risk* came in two waves. The first was characterized by top down state mandates for higher achievement and accountability (e.g., higher graduation requirements, standardized curriculum, increased testing, increased certification requirements for teachers). The second wave shifted the focus to schools and change from the bottom up guided by shared decision making with critical stakeholders.

The concept of whole school reform was emphasized by the passage of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Project by Congress in 1998, which appropriated $150 million to implement whole school reforms. These funds enabled almost three thousand schools to “receive awards of at least $50,000, each to implement whole school models or to develop their own
research-based reforms aimed at helping all children meet challenging state standards” (McChesney, 1998, p. 2).

The Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Project focused on Title I schools and defined characteristics of comprehensive school reform (Comprehensive School Reform Program Office, 2002). Comprehensive school reform designs set high standards for all students rather than for particular groups. Designs included a demonstrated research base to support best practices. To be considered “research based,” a program needed to demonstrate the theoretical foundation for the program, improvements in student achievement, effective implementation, and replicability (Comprehensive School Reform Program Office, 2002).

In 1983, A Nation at Risk was the catalyst for the movement toward standards-based education and assessment. Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 (IASA) made this concept of standards-based education and assessment known nationally. IASA reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. With the passage of IASA and the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the ESEA for the first time focused on the needs of all students, not just the disadvantaged and children at risk of school failure. Time and research have shown that for all children to learn, the entire school has to be focused on the learning of all children. The redesigned ESEA encouraged states and school districts to connect federal programs with state and local reforms affecting all children, while retaining the focus on educational equity for children with special needs.

ESEA gave states and localities more flexibility to design and operate their own federally funded education programs. The 1994 ESEA was intended to work in concert with Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which supported state and local efforts to set challenging content and
performance standards and to carry out school reforms that would raise the achievement levels of all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2002).

On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed into law the reauthorization of ESEA, renamed as the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). NCLB was a sweeping comprehensive school reform. The goal of NCLB was for all students to meet state academic and achievement standards. In 2010, NCLB, once viewed as a one-size-fits-all approach, was perceived as not meeting the educational needs of all students. Therefore, President Obama reauthorized ESEA as A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The blueprint focused on college readiness, teacher professional development, equity, Race to the Top, and innovation. A Blueprint for Reform was seen as a more flexible way to meet the needs of varying students and school districts.

On December 10, 2015, President Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). “This bipartisan measure reauthorizes the 50 year old ESEA, the nation’s national educational law and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students” (U.S Department of Education, 2015). The administration’s goals are to accelerate student achievement, close achievements gaps, and inspire our nation's children to excel, so that by 2020, America will once again have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world. The multiple reauthorizations of ESEA serve as a prime example of how educational change and reform have evolved over the past century, continually focusing on improving the educational environment for students and teachers.

A State Perspective
States have also enacted laws and statutes to meet the academic needs of the students within their state. Florida honed its focus on education with the Educational Accountability Act in 1971. The Florida Legislature passed Section 229.551 of the Florida Statutes in 1968. The law charged the Commissioner of Education to “expand the Department of Education’s capability for constructive educational change and services necessary to achieve greater quality in education” (Florida Department of Education, n.d.a). The Commissioner developed nine principles that he felt would guide the State of Florida’s education system. The Florida State Board of Education adopted the Commissioner’s nine principles in 1969. The principles focused on creating standards for achievement and quality controls, assessments, and efficient use of funds. The Commissioner also established an educational research and development program. The newly created research and development program focused on developing objectives and test items to assess the effectiveness of the objectives.

In 1970 the Florida Legislature enacted law (Chapter 70-399, Laws of Florida) authorizing the Commissioner to develop evaluation procedures "designed to assess objectively the educational programs offered by the public schools . . . and (develop) such methods as are necessary to assess the progress of students at various levels" (Florida Department of Education, n.d.a). The 1971 Legislature adopted the Commissioner's Plan for Educational Assessment in Florida, enacting the Educational Accountability Act (Section 229.57, Florida Statutes).

The Legislature then created the Florida Statewide Assessment Program in 1971. Key responsibilities of the program were:

1. Yearly establishment of statewide objectives
2. Assessment of student achievement of these objectives
3. Public reporting of results for the State, each district, and each school
4. Testing basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics

5. Development of a cost effectiveness plan (Florida Department of Education, n.d.a)

The Florida Department of Education then developed catalogs of objectives in various academic subject areas with “a comprehensive listing of specific behavioral objectives in the subject areas” (Florida Department of Education, n.d.a). The catalogs were designed to be used by classroom teachers to guide instruction in the classroom. Florida's first assessment was in reading and was administered in the 1971-1972 school year.

In 1974 revisions were made to the 1971 Educational Accountability Act. The revisions established testing in reading, writing, and mathematics in grades three and six and called for comparison of results to national indicators of student performance. The revisions also required annual reports of school progress to be distributed to parents (Florida Department of Education, n.d.b).

From the mid-1970’s through the 1980’s, revisions were continuously made to the state assessment tools. In 1998 the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) was introduced along with Florida’s curriculum frameworks called Sunshine State Standards. The FCAT measured student progress in the Sunshine State Standards benchmarks in reading, writing, mathematics, and science at four grade levels so that each subject is assessed at elementary, middle, and high school.

In 2007 revisions were made to the Sunshine State Standards to meet the ever-changing educational needs of the students. The standards are now referred to as the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. The FCAT also was redesigned to correlate with the new standards thus creating the FCAT 2.0 and end of course exams. The Florida Department of Education pursued the implementation of Common Core State Standards and the PARCC, Partnership for Assessment
of Readiness of College and Careers, test in 2014. Educational change is continually occurring within the Florida Department of Education to meet the demands of national agendas, ever-changing educational needs of students, and expanding postsecondary options for students.

We learn from this overview of educational reform and change that change is ever present in the field of education (Smith, 2008). School systems, school personnel, and even the school facility are continuously adapting and changing to meet the needs of society and the student (Sarason & Sarason, 1996). Sarason reported that schools have been and continue to be “a sensitive barometer of diverse changes in the larger society…and schools have inevitably responded or were forced to respond to this or that discrete aspect” (Sarason & Sarason, 1996, p.376). In The Roots of Educational Change (2005), Ann Lieberman notes that with knowledge of past practitioners, we “seek to build on their work in light of the social and economic realities of our time, and help schools and the communities they serve become better able to meet the complex challenges of the future” (Lieberman, 2005, p. 7).

**Perceptions of Educational Change - Acceptance or Resistance**

Perception drives reality. Each person interprets events from a combination of their past experiences, current understanding, the present situation, and information (Napier & Gershenfeld, 1999). Since everyone’s situation is different, responses to the same information will be unique to each individual. “Even with the most objective task, it is nearly impossible to keep our subjective views from altering our perception of what really exists” (Napier & Gershenfeld, 1999, p. 3).
Fullan and Miles (1992) assert that understanding the factors that influence the success and failure of change opens the door to a fresh approach for improving schools. They claim there are seven reasons why change fails:

1. Faulty maps of change
2. Complexity of problems that arise in the process
3. Symbols over substance
4. Impatience and superficial solutions
5. Misunderstanding resistance
6. Attrition of pockets of success
7. Misuse of knowledge about the change process

Fullan and Miles (1992) observed that “change is a journey,” and like any journey, change must be researched and must have a clear plan of action, buy-in must be obtained from all interested parties, and a purpose for the change must be present (p. 749). Change will always be present in education, and resistance will be a constant battle that will have to be overcome to successfully implement the change process (Shapiro, 2009).

Perie and Barker (1997) examined job satisfaction among America’s teachers. The teachers answered the following question: “How do public school teachers’ attitudes and perceptions of the workplace relate to their level of satisfaction?” The teachers surveyed identified principal interaction, teacher participation in school decision making, and influence over school policy as among the factors more closely associated with teacher satisfaction. The survey data identified that teachers feel more supported at their workplace when the school administration is involved and the teachers have decision-making power.

Goodlad (1984) found that teachers who were “more satisfied” with their jobs, worked in
an environment where teachers perceived they had greater influence over their use of time and more control of their jobs. In another study, Goodlad (1984) suggested that teachers perceive they have some control over what occurs in their classrooms, but limited control over what occurs outside the classroom. As the researchers probed deeper into teachers’ perceptions of their control, “there was a “marked decline in teachers’ sense of powerfulness as the focus moves from the classroom to the school as a whole” (p. 190).

Shared Decision Making (SDM) is a process of making educational decisions in a collaborative manner at the school level. Teachers, parents, school staff, as well as administrators, all have a say in how policies and programs should affect their schools. This is based on the premise that those closest to the children and where "the action is" will make the best decisions about the children's education. The group process is slower and requires more time. It is the principal who makes this model work. Teachers’ perception of their involvement in school reform rests with the school principal (Liontos, 1994). When teachers gather and identify issues and develop agreed upon outcomes, they own the decisions. In turn, they will become an active member of the implementation process.

Sarason and Sarason’s (1996) research found that

…decisions to seek a change rarely (if ever) took into account the ideas, opinions, and feelings of those who would be impacted by change. I mean serious, sustained discussion of what would be required of participants in terms of time, energy, commitments, and motivation. (p. 333)

Daft and Lengel (1998, 2000) described the importance of principals who provide teachers the opportunity to become “inspired rather than controlled. Leaders develop others by showing the way to vision, courage, heart, communication, mindfulness, and integrity” (p. 56). This act of
empowering and utilizing the strengths of teachers is coined ‘leadership density.’ It is very important for the principal to validate and respect when teachers take on various leadership roles in the school.

Teacher perceptions are very influential in the success of any change strategy. It is crucial that the principal knows the abilities and skill sets of their teachers in order to utilize their strengths and knowledge in the educational change process.

**Organizational Reform Specific to Charter Schools**

The U.S. Department of Education website defines charter schools thus:

Charter schools are public schools that operate with freedom from many of the local and state regulations that apply to traditional public schools. Charter schools allow parents, community leaders, educational entrepreneurs, and others the flexibility to innovate and provide students with increased educational options within the public school system. Charter schools are sponsored by local, state, or other organizations that monitor their quality while holding them accountable for academic results and responsible fiscal practices. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009)

Charter schools are public schools that are granted permission to operate by the local school district. They receive public funds to operate and function. They are a method to offer students and parents increased educational choices within the public school system. Most charter schools require students to apply for admissions. They commonly offer a specific academic focus such as foreign language, arts, technology, or academics.

In 1991, Minnesota was the first state to authorize charter schools, and the first charter school opened in 1992. The debate, however, continues over whether charter schools provide
students with a better education than traditional public schools. Since 1991 a total of 40 states and the District of Columbia have authorized charter schools (Rhim, Ahearn, & Lange, 2007). Proponents of charter schools contend that they expand the number and variety of school choices available to parents and students, increase innovation, improve student achievement, and promote competition with traditional public schools. (Booker et al., 2009; Imberman, 2009; Zimmer et al., 2009).

Manno, Finn, and Bierlein (1998) stated, “Charter schools are a promising, market-based reform strategy in American public education” (p. 537). With a continual focus on outcome measures ensuring “educational accountability,” policymakers also looked to market-based strategies such as school vouchers and charter schools to offer potential pathways to improvements in the quality of education offered in the United States (Hannaway & Woodroffe, 2003; Hirsh, 2007; Lubienski, 2003; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005; Rhim, Ahearn, & Lange, 2007; Vergari, 1999).

Charter and traditional schools do have one thing in common, however, the nature of their existence, namely academic achievement. In exchange for freedom from district and state bureaucracy, charters commit to high levels of academic achievement as a condition of their continued existence. Charter schools may be more likely to value Labaree’s (1997) second goal of social efficiency. This goal deals with providing educational opportunities for students who are academically higher achieving. Charters with selective admission policies based on academic achievement serve this goal well. High academic achievement of their students affects the contingencies under which charter schools exist - market survival through academic achievement.

A key feature of charter schools is their smaller size. Charter schools provide a more
intimate learning environment compared to the public non-charter school sector. They provide students and parents options and grade configurations not otherwise available in the public sector.

Organizational Reform Specific to the School within a School Model

The school within a school model is a separate autonomous unit that plans and runs its own program within a current school. Teachers and students are a part of the school within a school by choice. Students might have to meet entrance criteria to enter the special program. “Because the school-within-a-school model replicates a small school more closely than the other forms of downsizing, it is most likely to produce the positive effects of small-scale educational organization” (Dewees, 1999, p. 1). The most precise definition of a school-within-a-school model comes from Mary Anne Raywid (1995):

A school-within-a-school is a separate and autonomous unit formally authorized by the board of education and/or superintendent. It plans and runs its own program, has its own staff and students, and receives its own separate budget. Although it must negotiate the use of common space (gym, auditorium, playground) with a host school, and defer to the building principal on matters of safety and building operation, the school-within-a-school reports to a district official instead of being responsible to the building principal. Both its teachers and students are affiliated with the school-within-a-school as a matter of choice. (p. 21)

Dewees observes, “The school-within-a-school model has the greatest levels of autonomy, separateness, and distinctiveness. Students follow a separate education program, have their own faculty, and identify with their sub-school unit” (1999, p.2).
General literature on school size supports the argument that school size does affect students’ academic performance. Cotton (1996) identified several factors that affect student performance as it relates to school size:

- A smaller percentage of students drop out of small schools than large ones due, in part, to having a better sense of belonging.
- Student academic and general self-regard is higher in small schools than in large schools.
- Student attendance improves in small school settings, in general, but even more so for minority or poor students.
- Interpersonal relationships increase on all levels including student to student, faculty to faculty, administrator-faculty, faculty-student, administrator–student and school-parents.
- Truancy levels, discipline problems, violence, theft, drug use, and gang participation all decrease in a small school setting.
- Levels of extracurricular participation were found to be higher in small school settings.

(p. 4-14)

The degree to which the model is fully implemented allows the school within the school to be autonomous and to develop its own unique identity. Without full implementation of operational autonomy, the beneficial effects created from a small school environment, including sense of community and development of relationships, will not support the school within a school.

Organizational Reform Specific to Small Learning Communities Model

Small learning communities (SLCs) are described as any separately defined, individualized learning unit within a larger school setting. Students and teachers are scheduled together and
frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most or all of their classes (Sammon, 2000). SLC’s encompass elements of organization around houses or career academies, while intensifying focus on learning and the learner (Oxley, 2005). The structural basis of SLCs is an interdisciplinary team of teachers sharing a group of students in an area dedicated to their collaboration and common planning (Fine & Somerville, 1998; Oxley, 2001). A small school community creates the conditions for teachers to work in a different way with students and to effect curricular and instructional improvements. The definition also points out the need for teacher teams to operate free from school practices and structures that prevent them from responding effectively to what they have learned their students need.

From 1985 to 2000, the need to create a sense of community in large high schools fused with national pressure to improve educational outcomes to produce district-wide mandates to reorganize high schools into smaller units (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). By 2000, the organization of large high schools into SLCs had become a national reform movement (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). Multi-million dollar school reform projects were funded by The U.S. Department of Education under the Clinton Administration (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). The projects required small unit size as a feature. “In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Small Learning Community Program to support schools with more than 1,000 students to implement small learning community structures” (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008, p. 201).

Private philanthropic institutions, most notably the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, but also the Annenberg and Carnegie foundations, have joined forces with these federal initiatives and have committed far more funding to support high school reorganization and new, small high schools. (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008, p. 201)
SLCs serve as the platform for deeper school reform by improving relationships and process between teachers and administrators (Gladden, 1998). Visher, Teitelbaum, and Emanuel (1999) reported SLCs “promote increased student learning such as collegiality among teachers, and personalized teacher student relationships” (p. 21).

These communities are developed and have various descriptors that define what stakeholder group they represent. SLCs can be fully implemented throughout the whole school or can be isolated to only a specific group of students or grade level. The communities focus on learning and learning from each other. The type of SLCs implemented at Owl High School, the school site which is the focus of this study, is the house plan. The house plan assigns student and teachers to a house (small group). Within this house the students take classes together, and the teachers work together to support student learning (Duke & Trautuetter, 2001). School-based teacher learning communities are a byproduct of SLCs. They are found at grade levels, within departments, or sometimes across a whole school. Ideally, they operate at multiple levels within a school, complementing and reinforcing teachers’ work. Teacher learning communities within schools serve interrelated functions that contribute uniquely to teachers’ knowledge base, professionalism, and ability to act on what they learn. DuFour and Eaker (1998) share five characteristics of productive professional learning communities: “shared mission, vision, and values, collective inquiry, collaborative teams, action orientation and experimentation, continuous improvement, and results orientation” (p.25-29). Three such functions stand out: they build and manage knowledge; they create shared language and standards for practice and student outcomes; and they sustain aspects of their school’s culture vital to continued, consistent norms and instructional practice. Improving student learning is tied to teacher learning, and the ultimate
payoff of teachers learning is their commitment to work together to improve student instruction (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006).

Teachers in small learning environments have a deeper sense of buy-in because they feel as though decisions are made from the bottom up. Teacher buy-in and decision making authority raises school morale. Smaller learning environments enable teachers to build closer relationships with students and colleagues. These relationships transcend into higher student achievement and graduation rates.

One observed benefit of the SLC structure is the shared experience and knowledge of teachers working together as a team across the various academic and vocational disciplines. Supovitz and Christman (2005) reported, however, that creating the basic SLC structure within a school is insufficient; learning communities must possess autonomy, identity, personalization, support for teaching, and accountability, key elements that must be present for the success of SLCs (Cotton, 1996). These elements function separately and in conjunction to support the success of SLCs.

Gladden (1998) wrote,

By defining the important characteristics of small schools and understanding how small schools affect educational quality, educators and reformers can help create effective small schools and avoid school reform that means nothing more than insignificant reductions or freezes in school size. (p. 114)

In addition to positive student outcomes, teachers also gain valuable learning experiences from their colleagues. Teacher learning communities are a byproduct of SLCs. This outcome is another positive educational change that focuses on highest student achievement and would not be successful unless the students and faculty buy-in to the process and potential outcomes.
Summary

The literature review provides a brief map of educational change throughout history. Many attempts at educational change and reform have been made over the past century. A number of the reforms were originated and directed by the Federal Government, and others were developed at the school level. Early reform efforts met with large resistance, partially due to the reform addressing the issue from top down, partially due to perceptions that one approach will work at all schools, and partially influenced by the social turmoil of the times. While these approaches were met with great resistance, they did pave the road for future reforms that addressed the pitfalls of the previous reform efforts.

Studies of educational change have produced a multitude of diverse and often contradictory findings. Berman (1981) suggest five possible reasons for these non-cumulative and often clashing findings:

1. Studies have different objectives, and these objectives affect research design, focus, sample, and presentation of results.

2. Conception and measurement of independent and dependent variables are seldom the same. What some researchers would record as failure others could record as success.

3. The unit of analysis varies from individual, through school building level to school district level or even system level.

4. Many studies inadvertently confound analysis of process with analysis of variance. Process theory has a pull type causality while variance analysis has a push type causality. It is possible for process analysis to find that a variable (an event) is important to success and for variance analysis to find that the same variable is not statistically significant over many cases.
5. The variation and inconsistency of research findings may reflect educational reality, not simply inadequate methodology. Empirical studies have exposed how complex educational change is and have consistently challenged the possibility of simple comparable generalizations. (pp. 253-256)

Regardless of continuing complexities in studying change, educational change is ever-present, and the acceptance of or resistance to change continues to be a topic of many educational leaders from teachers, principals, and superintendents to presidents of universities (Smith, 2008).

The implementation of SLC’s at OHS was one form of educational change. With every reform questions continue to arise regarding how to improve the process to improve student achievement. This study focused on process analysis, specifically how SLCS’s influenced teacher collegiality, teacher-student relationships, and student academic performance.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology undertaken and the rationale for its appropriateness for the study. Chapter 4 presents the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 summarizes and discusses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research and implications for practice.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This study explored one aspect of educational change, small learning communities (SLC’s), at a single high school in Pinellas County, Florida. Specifically, this study explored how teachers responded to the implementation of grade level SLC reform in three areas: teacher collegiality, student teacher relationships, and instruction.

A case study approach was used focusing on one depository of documents, the meeting minutes of the SLCs. While documents are more commonly used as a supplemental data source in case study, “qualitative researchers are turning to documents as their primary source of data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.57). The primary research question guiding the study was: How do the teachers at Owl High School focus their efforts to improve student achievement through SLC reform? Three sub-questions further guided exploration of the primary question:

4. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher collegiality in their SLC meetings?
5. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher student relationships in their SLC meetings?
6. In what ways did teachers discuss instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance in their SLC meetings?

Theoretical Framework

This study was situated in case study and document analysis research perspectives. Robert Stake (1995) noted that “cases of interest” in education “are people and programs” (p. 1). We seek to understand what makes them unique and what makes them similar. We try to learn “how they
function in their ordinary pursuits” (p. 1). A case study provides for detailed examination of one setting, individual, or event (Bogdan & Biklen, 2011). Yin (2003) notes that a case study is useful for understanding what, how and why questions and when it is important to look at relevant contextual conditions. This case study is, in particular, descriptive as it looks to describe an intervention (SLCs) in a real-life context undergoing change.

Documents are a “record of human activity” created as people engage in “ongoing day-to-day activities” and can be a valuable data source in case study (Olson, 2010, p. 318). Education documents provide a natural, contextual source of information about related endeavors; yet, researchers like Garman (1982) and Guba and Lincoln (1982) have noted that the analysis of written documents has been an under-used technique in educational evaluation. Documents are “unobtrusive” and “stable” (Bowen, 2009). They are not affected or influenced by a researcher’s presence (e.g., while conducting observations or interviews).

For this research study documents, particularly meeting minutes of the OHS SLCs, were selected as the primary data source rather than as a supplemental data source to other common data sources in a case study (e.g., interviews). I felt the meeting minutes captured the true feelings and emotions of the teachers as they participated in the meetings. The minutes were not filtered or suppressed; they provided an accurate account of what the SLCs were dealing with or discussing over the six year time period. I also felt that the teachers might not be as open in their dialogue on a questionnaire or interview that was administered by their principal. The meeting minutes were an unobtrusive way for me to gain the most accurate account during this time period.

Document analysis involves skimming, reading and interpretation. Skimming is an initial review of the document to identify relevant passages of text, separating pertinent information from non-pertinent information (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This initial review is followed by a more
focused re-reading and closer review of passages selected to uncover themes or patterns or to identify passages that reflect characteristics of predefined categories or codes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The researcher then attempts to understand the meaning of the themes and patterns across the passages selected.

Content analysis was the method of analysis utilized to enhance and define document analysis in this case study. Content analysis is the systematic examination of written or recorded communication in order to break down, identify, and analyze the presence or relations of words, word sense, characters, sentences, concepts, or common themes. The focus of content analysis is critical examination, rather than a mere description, of the content.

**Site Selection**

I chose the Pinellas County School District because I have worked there for the past nineteen years and am familiar with the practices and policies of the District. I chose OHS because it is a site rich in information as SLC’s were implemented there to meet the educational and emotional needs of the students even though this model was not state mandated. Furthermore, I am part of the administration. Thus OHS was accessible and hospitable to the inquiry.

**Description of School District and School**

During the 2008 - 2009 school year, the school district in Pinellas County, Florida, served more than 104,000 students kindergarten through twelfth grade (Pinellas County Schools, 2008). The district has 139 schools, Kindergarten through 12th grade. Seventeen high schools enroll 30,510 students. The demographic make-up of the district is a diverse multicultural population. There are 11,130 full- and part-time instructional and administrative personnel and 7,089 full- and
part-time support staff. Forty-one percent of the instructional and administrative staff have a master’s degree or higher. The school district has a $1.55 billion budget, and the average per pupil expenditure is $7,997.

The case focuses on Owl High School, one of seventeen high schools in the district. The school opened in 1996 and is located in a suburban area with a socioeconomic status that ranges from low to high. The school has a diverse student population of about 2,600 students with little mobility. OHS presented itself with a unique opportunity to implement SLCs because the school has two existing and highly functioning magnet programs that have strict entrance criteria. The magnet student population is approximately 1,100 students, and the other 1,500 students reside within the attendance area of the school. The uniqueness of the faculty/staff makeup due to the two magnet programs made OHS a unique and interesting site in which to conduct research.

In the 2008 - 2009 school year OHS received a B grade from the State of Florida’s School Accountability Report. The school scored enough points to earn an A but was awarded a B because only 47% of the lowest 25% of ninth and tenth grade students did not make learning gains or Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the reading portion of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) (www.fldoe.org). In subsequent school years from 2009-2013, OHS received an A grade from the State of Florida’s School Accountability Report.

The school district received funds from the Gates Foundation to support the implementation of SLCs in high schools. This initiative was very well received by the local high schools. However, as OHS was not a recipient of the grant monies, they did move forward with the concept of SLCs to support student academic success.

The SLCs at OHS consists of a medical SLC, an IB (International Baccalaureate) SLC, and an SLC at each grade level 9 through 12 for the students not enrolled in a magnet program. The
SLCs meet once a month and discuss program and grade level appropriate information. The teachers also utilize this time to discuss students that they have in common and best practices to support students’ academic success.

The medical SLC consists of 25 teachers from all core subject areas and five nurses. The uniqueness of this SLC is that it focuses all academics around a central medical theme. The students in this SLC are required to take a medical course each year and ultimately earn industry certification at the conclusion of their high school years.

The IB SLC consists of 25 teachers from all core subject areas including IB specific electives. The uniqueness of this SLC is that it focuses all academics around the IB curriculum set forth by International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO). The course sequence and curriculum are very specific to ensure the students are exposed to a broad international curriculum to prepare them for their final IB exams at the end of their senior year.

The grade level SLCs consist of 65 teachers from all core subject areas and elective areas. Since these SLCs do not have a magnet theme, the teachers strive very hard to ensure their students are recognized for their success and achievements. The grade level SLC teachers utilize this time to build lessons with their colleagues and celebrate student successes. The ability for the teachers to meet in SLCs provides them a common time to support their students’ academic success. All of the SLCs at OHS are high functioning learning communities for the teachers that support student growth and success.

**Researcher Role**

I was a participant observer in this six-year educational change process at OHS. Marshall and Rossman (1999) stated, “Immersion in the setting allows the researcher to hear, see, and begin
to experience reality as the participants do … This method for gathering data is basic to all qualitative studies” (p. 106). This immersion allowed the researcher to gain insight and experience the SLC meetings first hand. I was immersed in the transition process into SLC’s. I actively participated in monthly SLC grade level meetings. The teachers coordinated and ran the meetings; I participated and shared the administrator perspective. While I was engaged in the meetings, I observed teachers working together to create the best learning environment for their students. They would share best practices, offer professional development, and support to their colleagues. I gained valuable insight from attending the SLC meetings. They afforded me the opportunity to interact with the teachers outside their classroom and observe them interact and support each other. These insights helped bring the meeting minutes to life and gave me a better perspective of the actual teacher interaction during the meetings.

As the principle researcher I assumed a second role, as the researcher interpreting the data. I recognized that possible bias could result from my dual role, but I feel that my dual role afforded me a unique opportunity to immerse myself in the study and truly understand the purpose of the SLC meetings and the resources the teachers gained by attending the monthly meetings.

**Data Sources**

OHS SLC meeting minutes were the primary data source. The minutes represented the six years of SLC meetings in effect when the study took place in 2012-2013. The minutes were recorded by a teacher in the SLC, reviewed for accuracy by the other teachers at the meeting, and then uploaded to a private OHS school folder on the OHS mail system. This process allowed all faculty and staff to have access and to read and know what had occurred in the meetings. The meetings were held every month for the ten months that school was in session. The minutes
developed from each meeting were approximately two pages in length. This generated approximately 700 pages of OHS SLC meeting minutes. The minutes contained the following information: present and absent members, announcements, student discussions, best practices, exceptional student education presentations, professional development, just in time information, and upcoming events (Appendix A – Sample OHS SLC Meeting Minutes).

A secondary data source was District level communication that pertained to District level changes that were occurring simultaneously during OHS’s transformation into SLC’s. The District level changes affected all schools at varying degrees. The communications focused on two events, high schools transitioning from a six period day to a seven period day and implementing district wide elementary through high school abbreviated school day on Wednesdays.

**Content Analysis**

Smith states “qualitative analysis deals with the forms and antecedent consequent patterns of form, while quantitative analysis deals with duration and frequency of form” (Smith, 1975, p. 218). It has been determined that some of the best content analyses have utilized both qualitative and quantitative operations (Weber, 1990). However, this qualitative study used an interpretive approach to the analysis of content in the minutes of meetings focused on small learning communities. Content analysis is an excellent tool to identify themes or categories within a body of content. It also provides a “rich description of the social reality created by those themes/categories” (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009, p.11). The use of content analysis opens the door for the development of new theories and models, and validating existing theories (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). The goal of content analysis is “to provide knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992, p. 314).
Mayring (2000) described content analysis as “an approach of empirical, methodological controlled analysis of texts within their context of communication, following content analytic rules and step by step models, without rash quantification” (p. 2). Mayring further describes content analysis as analysis of text in the context of communication. As I was present during the OHS SLC meetings, I have insight into the context of the communication that has been recorded in the minutes. Patton (2002) defines content analysis as “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p.453). Patton’s definition of content analysis appears to be the most simplistically stated but captures the essence of content analysis as conducted in this study.

This method was chosen because it supported the primary research question: How do the teachers at OHS focus their efforts to improve student achievement through SLC reform? Content analysis enabled me to interpret SLC meeting minutes and to answer the primary research question through the three sub questions.

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) defined content analysis as “a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systemic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (p. 1278). In this analysis, I utilized a classification process of coding and identifying themes that occurred in the OHS SLC meeting minutes. More specifically, the content analysis examined the minutes for three themes: teacher collegiality, teacher-student relationships, and instructional practices.

**Data Analysis Process**

The data analysis process was guided by Zhang and Wildermuth’s (2009) eight steps to conducting a content analysis (pp. 3-5):
• Step 1: Prepare the data.
• Step 2: Define the unit of analysis.
• Step 3: Develop categories and a coding scheme.
• Step 4: Test your coding scheme on a sample of text.
• Step 5: Code all the text.
• Step 6: Assess your coding consistency.
• Step 7: Draw conclusions from the coded data.
• Step 8: Report your methods and findings.

I collected and organized the data, six years of OHS SLC meeting minutes. I defined the unit of analysis and developed categories that were guided by the primary research question, how do the teachers at OHS focus their efforts to improve student achievement through SLC reform? The three sub-questions provided more specific guidance:

1. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher collegiality in the context of OHS’s SLC meetings?
2. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher student relationships in the context of OHS’s SLC meetings?
3. In what ways did teachers discuss instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance in the context of OHS’s SLC meetings?

I developed a coding scheme that correlated with the research questions. I utilized a color-coding system to identify the various categories. The color-coding system was tested on a set of OHS SLC meeting minutes to ensure the process that was chosen was feasible and repeatable (See Appendix B1- B3 for sample OHS SLC Meeting Minutes that are Color Coded). I then coded six years of OHS SLC meeting minutes. The coding process that was utilized was repeated for all
three sub-questions. The coding was reviewed to ensure consistency throughout the six years of meeting minutes. The coded information was grouped into three categories as they related to the research questions.

Table 3.1 is an example of the coded meeting minute excerpts that were grouped by category. The three categories (teacher collegiality, teacher student relationships, and instructional practices) were generated from the research questions.

Table 3.1 Example of OHS SLC Meeting Minute Excerpts Grouped by Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>SLC Meeting Minute Excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Collegiality</td>
<td>• Individual professional development plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Core teachers will meet with the middle school teachers to share expectations for rising 9th graders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developing reading plans for specific subjects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developed a list of professional development opportunities that can be delivered by their colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Building Grade level Unity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Student Relationships</td>
<td>• Discussed establishing a mentoring program, pairing teachers with at-risk students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Peer Connectors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contacting parents and bringing them in the loop to assist in the learning and closing the achievement gap.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Recognizing students for academic success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Informal conversations with struggling students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Practices</td>
<td>• Student progress reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Administrative walk throughs to ensure curriculum delivery meeting the students' needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed being proactive to address at risk behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SLC collaborated and shared strategies to assist struggling students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed implementing an advisory period to support student academic success.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grouping the meeting minute excerpts by category afforded me the opportunity to view the data organized by the three research questions. I then identified the themes that emerged within
the categories. Table 3.2 is a sample of the themes that emerged in the first category, teacher collegiality.

Table 3.2
Sample of the themes that emerged in the first category, teacher collegiality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>SLC Meeting Minute Excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Collegial Sharing and Support | • Shared lesson plan formats for all teachers at OHS.  
  • Teachers work together to support a safe learning environment.  
  • Teachers shared best practices.  
  • Core teachers will meet with the middle school teachers to share expectations for rising 9th grade students.                                                                                                    |
| Professional Development      | • ESE teachers trained their grade level house on a different disability every month.  
  • Individual Professional Development Plans  
  • Discussed various professional development opportunities to support the SLC.                                                                                                                                         |
| Academic Student Support      | • Discussed a possible different schedule for the next school year.  
  • Discussed specific grade level behaviors over the past six weeks.  
  • Creation of homeroom committee to discuss the process of designing and implementing a homeroom the following school year.  
  • Study skills class for 9th grade students.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| SLC Future Planning           | • SLC discussed the needs for their house meetings for the upcoming school year.  
  • SLC discussed what they want to focus on for the new school year.  
  • Discussion on teacher goals. What they are planning, hope to accomplish this school year.                                                                                                                       |

Table 3.3 is a sample of the themes that emerged in the second category, teacher student relationships.
Table 3.3
Sample of the themes that emerged in the second category, teacher student relationships.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>SLC Meeting Minute Excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collegial Sharing and Support</strong></td>
<td>• Teachers shared interventions that they have been implementing to build a relationship with their students and at risk students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• PBS/RTI - teachers shared how to document interactions students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SLC shared with colleagues how they develop relationships with their students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• 12th grade SLC discussed their pyramid of interventions that they used to support their students’ success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Academic Student Support</strong></td>
<td>• Teachers working with students developing goals for the future.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Developing homeroom period where the teacher can serve as the advisor and guide the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teachers are staying in contact with students and parents about grades and possible failures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed establishing a mentoring program pairing teachers with at risk students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher/Student Relationships/Celebrations</strong></td>
<td>• SLC discussed how relationships affect the achievement gap - teachers discussed best practices in developing relationships with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Freshman pinning ceremony.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Senior celebration planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed developing a wall of fame for the seniors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SLC discussed ideas to assist the students to feel special about their senior year. Possible painting of senior parking spots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parent/Community Support</strong></td>
<td>• Parent booster clubs to support the students and school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advisory board meetings held quarterly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 is a sample of the themes that emerged in the third category, instructional practice.
Table 3.4

Sample of the themes that emerged in the third category, instructional practices.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>SLC Meeting Minute Excerpts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collegial Sharing/</td>
<td>• Discussed summer program to assist 9th grade students acclimate to HS.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support &amp;</td>
<td>• Discussed various schedule types for the next school year - discussed pluses and deltas of the various schedules.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Student Support</td>
<td>• Discussed how to improve high school and student academic success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussion about implementing an advisory period to support student academic success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SLCs discussed supporting student’s academic needs in AP classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships &amp; Celebrations</td>
<td>• SLC’s discussed how to build unity and purpose for the students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I determined that within the three categories (teacher collegiality, teacher student relationships, and instructional practices) there existed overlap in the themes. This overlap will be explained in more detail in chapters four and five. The themes that emerged in all three categories afforded me the opportunity to draw conclusions based on the themes.

To provide triangulation I also analyzed District level communication that pertained to District level changes that were occurring simultaneously during OHS’s transformation into SLC’s. The District level changes affected all schools at varying degrees. The communications focused on two events. The first District level change was all high schools transitioned from a six period day to a seven period day; the second District level change was the District wide implementation in elementary through high school of the abbreviated school day every Wednesday. These two District level events affected morale and climate throughout the District.
Since I was an active participant in the OHS SLC meetings, I was able to view the impact the two District changes had on the faculty, staff and SLC transition.

Interpreting the categorized data goes beyond the initial data review. The researcher must ask what can be learned from the total process. Seidman (1998) has several guided questions that can assist in developing a total understanding of the data obtained through the study:

1. What connective themes are there among the experiences of the participants?
2. How do I understand and explain these connections?
3. What do I understand now that I did not understand before?
4. What surprises have there been?
5. What confirms previous instincts? (p. 110)

Seidman (1998) also suggests that the answers to these questions might lead to further research. Based on categorized data and Seidman’s guiding questions, conclusions were developed, and the findings are reported in chapter 5.

Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recognized that qualitative content analyses could not be gauged using the conventional criteria of validity, reliability, and objectivity. They proposed four criteria for evaluating the data derived from qualitative content analyses: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Bradley (1993) defines credibility as “adequate representation of the constructions of the social world under study” (p.436). Credibility was maintained throughout this analysis through accurate transcribing of OHS SLC meeting minutes to ensure the excerpts were not taken out of the context in which they were presented. Another key factor that maintained credibility was that the principle researcher was an active
participant in the meetings and is employed at OHS. A transparent process for coding and drawing conclusions positively impacts the credibility of the research results.

Transferability is the “extent to which the researchers’ working hypothesis can be applied to another context” (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009, p. 6). In order for transferability to apply, the principle researcher must provide data sets and descriptions so that the process can be transferable to other sets of data (Zhang & Wildermuth, 2009). Transferability was applied due to the detailed and precise descriptions the principle researcher provided for future researchers to follow.

Dependability is the “coherence of the internal process and the way the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the phenomena” (Bradley, 1993, p.437). The principle researcher in this analysis details every step of the data collection process and provides explanations for variances.

Confirmability is the “extent to which the characteristics of the data, as posted by the researcher, can be confirmed by others who read or review the research results” (Bradley, 1993, p.437). The data reported from the content analysis displays characteristics and similarities to the research reported in the literature review. The data is not creating extreme outliers and is consistent with the literature surrounding this subject area.

Summary

Chapter three situates the study in case study and document analysis perspectives. It describes site selection, the school district context, and the focus of the case. The next portion of the chapter described data sources, researcher role, and content analysis process. Finally, considerations of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were addressed. The findings presented in Chapter 4 will be presented utilizing Consta’s simplest to most complex
method of presenting data. Data will be presented from the simplest example to the most complex example (Chenail, 1995).
Chapter Four

Findings and Results

This study grew out of my participation in and curiosity about the implementation of small learning communities (SLCs) in a high school in Pinellas County, Florida. The basic intent of SLCs is to focus teachers on building relationships with their students and each other to better meet students’ academic and personal needs. The SLCs also were purported to support teacher collegiality, affording teachers the opportunity to learn and grow from each other’s knowledge and educational background.

I was curious about how this happened. I explored how teachers responded to the implementation of grade level SLC reform in three areas: teacher collegiality, student teacher relationships, and instruction. The primary research question guiding the study was: How do the teachers at Owl High School focus their efforts to improve student achievement through SLC reform? Three sub-questions further guided exploration of the primary question:

7. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher collegiality in their SLC meetings?
8. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher student relationships in their SLC meetings?
9. In what ways did teachers discuss instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance in their SLC meetings?

The study was situated in case study and document analysis research perspectives. Descriptive case study was selected, in particular, as I wanted to describe an intervention (SLCs) in a real-life context undergoing change. Documents are a “record of human activity” created as
people engage in “ongoing day-to-day activities” and can be a valuable data source in case study (Olson, 2010, p. 318). OHS SLC meeting minutes were the primary data source. The minutes represented the six years of SLC meetings in effect when the study took place in 2012-2013.

Content analysis was used to analyze approximately 700 pages of grade level SLC meeting minutes, produced over six years of implementation of the SLCs. The minutes were analyzed for themes as they related to the research question: teacher collegiality, teacher-student relationships, and instructional practice. Findings of the study follow and are presented in relation to these three themes.

**Analysis of Teacher Collegiality**

For the purposes of this study, teacher collegiality was defined as teachers working together to collaboratively solve problems of practice as a community of learners to foster school-wide collaboration and conversation (Harris & Anthony, 2001).

The initial level of review within the teacher collegiality theme revealed topics in what teachers discussed. Table 1 provides a sample of topics taken from the OHS SLC meeting minutes and coded as teacher collegiality. A complete listing of all the excerpts is located in Appendix C1. 56 examples of teacher collegiality were coded in the meeting minutes, representing 39 percent of the total coding’s.
Table 4.1

Topics Discussed under the Theme of Teacher Collegiality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Discussion Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teacher Collegiality      | • Parent involvement<br>• L35 students and strategies<br>• Teaming across grade levels and within subject areas, (e.g., "it was discussed that teaming within subject areas during house meetings is a good use of time."
• Opportunity to for sharing teaching strategies<br>• Building grade level team unity<br>• Offering support with behavior issues, (e.g., “You may have success with a student in your class, but he/she is not doing well in another class, so you share what you may be doing that could help the student in all their classes."
• Communications with parents and how to document them in the student information system<br>• Student placement in honors classes<br>• Struggling students with academics and attendance<br>• Possibility of implementing a study hall and the pluses and negatives of implementing a study hall<br>• Teacher goals, what they are planning, hope to accomplish this school year<br>• Resources that are available to assist students who struggle in reading and math |

The second level of review identified subthemes that characterized why teachers discussed certain topics and how they might use the topics they discussed. Table 4.2 identifies the subthemes associated. These are:

- Collegial sharing and support,
- Academic student support,
- Professional development,
- Future planning, and
- Collegial sharing and support combined with academic student support
It became apparent when identifying themes that some of the themes overlapped and that one was needed for the success of the other. This was displayed in the last themed grouping. I also identified the term “discussions” used repeatedly throughout the minutes. Since I was also an active participant in the SLC meetings, I was able to elaborate on the context in which the word was used during the meetings. The term “discussions” was used to describe teacher conversations that occurred during the OHS SLC meetings. The discussions were seen as collegial conversations where the teachers were able to assist each other or learn from each other.

“Collegiality stems from discussions about students, instruction, and curriculum” (Hoerr, 1996, p.3). Hoerr’s statement about collegiality encompasses and describes the discussions that transpired in the OHS SLC meetings. Teacher collegiality flourished in teacher discussions in the OHS SLC meetings. The first theme that emerged from the meeting minute excerpts was collegial sharing and support. This theme encapsulates and accurately describes the discussions that transpired in the OHS SLC meetings. For example:

- **09/2007 minutes**, “There is an expectation that all students can show growth. Administrators will begin discussions with individual teachers to see how this is being accomplished by examining lesson plans, grade books, IPDP’s, past teacher evaluations, etc.”

- **02/2008 minutes**, “discussed best practices and concrete examples, graphic organizers, step by step instructions, planners, student placement, and student routines.”
Table 4.2

Subthemes in Topics Discussed under the Theme of Teacher Collegiality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Examples from SLC Meeting Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collegial Sharing &amp; Support</td>
<td>• Shared lesson plan format for all teachers at OHS&lt;br&gt;• Teachers work together to support a safe learning environment&lt;br&gt;• Best practices&lt;br&gt;• Teacher asked her SLC &quot;how do they motivate non-interested students?&quot;&lt;br&gt;• Teachers supported each other with evaluation process&lt;br&gt;• Teachers in SLC's work together to develop classroom processes&lt;br&gt;• Discussed implementing a mentor process and having teachers volunteer to mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Student Support</td>
<td>• Discussed a possible different schedule for the next school year&lt;br&gt;• Discussed specific grade level behaviors over the past 6 weeks&lt;br&gt;• Creation of homeroom committee to discuss the process of designing and implementing a homeroom the following school year&lt;br&gt;• Teachers discussed the need to have more specific conversations with their colleagues about general 9th grade information and student.&lt;br&gt;• SLC's discussed the new freshman experience class how it can be resource for the students.&lt;br&gt;• RTI process and how it will assist the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development</td>
<td>• ESE teachers trained their grade level houses on a different disability every month. The disabilities that are chosen to be presented are representative of the ESE students at OHS. They shared with the SLC how they can assist students who have this specific disability.&lt;br&gt;• Individual Professional Development Plans&lt;br&gt;• Developed a list of professional development opportunities that can be delivered by their colleagues.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Planning</td>
<td>• SLC's discussed needs for their house meetings for the upcoming school year.&lt;br&gt;• SLC's discussed what they want to focus on for the new school year.&lt;br&gt;• Discussions on teacher goals, what they are planning, hope to accomplish this school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial Sharing &amp; Academic Student Support</td>
<td>• Parent conferences&lt;br&gt;• Parent involvement&lt;br&gt;• Discussions a Cohort of L35 students and strategies&lt;br&gt;• Building grade level unity&lt;br&gt;• Teachers offered support with behaviors issues&lt;br&gt;• Shared strategies of successful behavior practices&lt;br&gt;• Discussed communications with parents and how to document&lt;br&gt;• Discussed the possibility of implementing study hall</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• 09/2010 minutes, “Opened by discussing suggestions for teaming across grade levels and within subject areas. It was expressed that teaming within subject areas during a house meeting could be time spent elsewhere because we are already doing this in our department meetings. It was mentioned that house meetings could be an opportunity for sharing of teacher strategies.”

These examples provide evidence that their SLC discussions enabled the teachers to and share and learn with their colleagues.

The second theme that emerged from the meeting minutes was academic student support. Academic student support was supported through collegial conversations that focused on strategies that the teachers were learning and willing to implement to support student’s academics. For example:

• 09/2007 meeting minutes, “D or F grades for any students – call home to parents – keep parents informed and always call if a student’s grade drops 2 or more letter grades.”

• 04/2009 meeting minutes, “We discussed the students who should advance to AP Lit and Lang next year. Course recommendation forms will go out tomorrow for teacher signatures.”

• 11/2010 meeting minutes, “Thank you to JW who composed a list of at risk juniors (GPA & Credits). We also named a few students who are chronically absent in out classes. Through email we are going to brainstorm ways to implement a mentor system.”

The OHS SLC teacher discussions about the various academic student supports only strengthened the presence of collegiality in the SLC meetings. The teachers discussed creating homerooms, a different schedule for the next school year, study skills classes for 9th grade students, teachers
shared strategies, discussions about teaming cross grade levels within subject areas, and core teachers meeting with middle school teachers to share expectations for rising 9th grade students. These excerpts demonstrate the teacher’s willingness and openness to working with each other to ensure the academic success of the students.

The third theme that emerged from the meeting minutes was professional development. Professional development is crucial in ensuring that all the teachers are well versed in their subject area and that they are abreast of current best practices. Since the professional development was conducted by their peers, teacher collegiality was discussed and displayed throughout this theme.

For example:

- 08/2007 meeting minutes, “Training on completing IPDP – individualized professional development plan.”
- 12/2007 meeting minutes, “ESE professional development lead by ESE teacher.”
- 04/2008 meeting minutes, “August 11, 2008 will be the OHS professional development day the topics that will include: review the SIP, how OHS aligns the school SIP to the County plan, review learning gains/student achievement, tier 1 & 2 RTI.”

The fourth theme that emerged from the meeting minutes was future planning. The teachers worked together to identify the future needs of their SLC’s. They identified their goals and developed plans that were guided by the goals. For example:

- 03/2009 meeting minutes, “More specific talk about 9th grade information rather than general information.”
- 05/2009 meeting minutes, “Questionnaire was distributed to determine what needs to be discussed at the house meetings next school year and what needs to be brought up in summer institute.”
05/2010 meeting minutes, “Brainstorming was conducted on the following topics to plan for the next school year: what should our focus be for the meetings, identify 3 items that should be done each meeting, and identify what should be brought to each meeting by all members.”

The examples provide evidence that teachers didn’t just talk about problems in their SLC meetings. They also talked about actions that they could take to address issues they raised. Teacher collegiality increased their willingness to work together to determine future needs and goals of the OHS SLC’s.

Perie and Baker (1997) examined job satisfaction among America’s teachers. The teachers answered the following question: “How do public school teachers’ attitudes and perceptions of the workplace relate to their level of satisfaction?” The teachers surveyed identified principal interaction, teacher participation in school decision-making, and influence over school policy as among the factors more closely associated with teacher satisfaction. The survey data identified that teachers feel more supported at their workplace when the school administration is involved and the teachers have decision-making power. Goodlad (1984) found that teachers who were “more satisfied” with their jobs, worked in an environment where teachers perceived they had greater influence over their use of time, and more control of their jobs. The teachers’ ability to control and plan for the future of the OHS SLC’s provided them an active part in the decision making process. I observed this process of shared decision-making throughout the OHS SLC meetings. I also observed that this process aided the teachers in developing a positive perception of the transition into SLC’s. The teachers’ positive perception of the transition into SLC’s eliminated resistance. Teacher perceptions are very influential in the success of any change strategy.
The fifth theme that emerged from the meeting minutes was a combined theme collegial sharing and support and academic student support. It became apparent when identifying themes that some of the themes overlapped and that one was needed for the success of the other. For example:

- 09/2007 meeting minutes, “Teacher discussions centered on the rubric of Richard DuFour’s 3 Questions for student growth.”
- 02/2008 meeting minutes, “Teachers discuss 9th grade questionnaire to build ideas for the following school year. To better help acclimate students to 9th grade and high school.”
- 01/2009 meeting minutes, “A reading plan for each course you teach, even if students have passed FCAT. The purpose is to teach reading across the curriculum and in all disciplines.”

The excerpts focus on collegial discussions that enabled teachers to focus on academic support needed for the students and develop common understanding of why supports were appropriate.

A further example was parent conferences. The teachers came to understand they must come together with a student’s parent and discuss academic success and areas of improvements. The end result of these conferences is the teachers working jointly together with the parents to support a student’s academic success. For example

- 09/2007 meeting minutes, “Teachers discussed contacting parents of students who currently have a D or F in their class to keep them informed and develop a plan to get the student back on track.”
- 10/2011 meeting minutes, “The guidance counselor stated he had been working with parents and students to develop academic plans to ensure they are on track for graduation.”
• 04/2012 meeting minutes, “Parents were contacted of students with attendance issues and a plan was developed in conjunction with the parents to help support the student’s academic success and attendance at school.”

A third level of data analysis was conducted involving the District level communication around the implementation of a seven period day in all high schools. This initiative was focused on student achievement; unfortunately, it was met with opposition from the teachers. They felt they were being told to teach an additional period without a pay increase; they were also upset because their teaching periods would be shortened to accommodate the seventh period.

This initiative intended to offer students the ability to earn an additional half credit every semester. It also afforded students the opportunity to make up a credit or take an additional course. Many discussions centered on this topic during the OHS SLC meetings. Table 4.3 provides examples of topics discussed in SLC meetings related to district communications about the seven period day implementation.

Table 4.3
Examples of Topics Discussed Related to District Communications about the Seven Period Day Implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Communication</th>
<th>Examples from SLC Meeting Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Email                      | • Less time to focus on students
|                            | • Have less review time – shortened classes = fewer days of instruction
|                            | • Loss of instructional time
|                            | • Teacher questioned how the curriculum could be covered in the shorter periods
|                            | • Possibility of going to an A/B day schedule                                                   |
| School Board Meeting       | • Lesson planning for shorter class periods.                                                     |
| Minutes                    | • Working with colleagues to build pacing guides for the school year to ensure all curriculum is covered. |
I recalled many conversations during the SLC meetings that focused on preparing for the implementation of the seven period day. I also recalled the teachers working together to develop lessons that maximized their teaching during the shorter class periods. While this initiative was not popular or welcomed by the teachers, they chose to work together to ensure the students had a successful learning environment. This ability to work together was symbolic of the collegiality amongst the OHS staff.

I was an active participant in the OHS SLC meetings. Hoerr (1996) states that “when the principal actually takes part in the meetings, he or she demonstrates that collegiality is valued” (p.3). By my active participation, I demonstrated collegiality and made key observations that supported the themes that emerged from the OHS SLC meeting minute excerpts. For example, during the numerous conversations with teachers and support staff that focused on transitioning to a seven period school day, I supported the teachers as they worked through the process by providing professional development and curriculum support.

Over time I observed in the monthly meetings teachers working together and learning from each other. The teachers were focused on supporting highest student achievement despite their initial dissatisfaction with the district seven period day initiative. They routinely brainstormed ideas to engage the at-risk students and share best practices to better serve students in the new scheduling configuration and to better themselves in their chosen profession of education.

Analysis of Teacher-Student Relationships

For the purpose of this study teacher-student relationships were defined as caring, authentic connections, support and interdependence between students and teachers in a learning environment (Pianta, Hamre & Allen, 2012). Six years of OHS SLC meeting minutes were analyzed to address
the second research sub question: In what ways did teachers discuss teacher student relationships in the context of OHS’s SLC meetings?

The initial level of review within the teacher-student relationships theme revealed topics that teachers discussed in the SLC meetings. Table 4 lists a sample of topics taken from the OHS SLC meeting minutes coded as teacher-student relationships. A complete listing of all the excerpts in this theme is located in Appendix D1. 45 examples of teacher-student relationships were coded in the meeting minutes, representing 31 percent of the total coding’s.

Table 4.4

Topics Discussed under the Theme of Teacher-Student Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Discussion Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teacher-Student Relationships  | • Discussed establishing a mentoring program, pairing teachers with at risk students  
                                 | • Teachers shared interventions that they have been implementing to build a relationship with their students and at risk students  
                                 | • "Discussions on ways to develop positive relationships with students and share with them real world situations".  
                                 | • Monitoring the progress of L35 students in your classes and keeping tabs on these students as FCAT approaches  
                                 | • Freshman socials - "We need to have freshman socials two times a year"  
                                 | • Developing a homeroom period where the teacher can serve as the advisor and guide the students  
                                 | • "Phreshmen Phootball Phrenzy" established to help the freshman transition into high school and an opportunity to interact with the 9th grade teachers in a non-classroom setting  
                                 | • Teachers are staying in contact with students and parents about grades and possible failures  
                                 | • Identify ways to recognize student success  
                                 | • AVID program - teacher recommendations for program  
                                 | • Peer Connectors  
                                 | • PBS/RTI - teachers documenting interactions with students |
The second level of review identified subthemes that characterized actions teachers were taking to build teacher-student relationships and teachers collegial sharing and support of each other’s strategies. Table 4.5 describes the subthemes that emerged:

- Academic student support,
- Teacher student relationships/celebrations,
- Academic student support combined with collegial sharing and support,
- Teacher student relationships/celebrations combined with academic student support, and
- Teacher student relationships/celebrations combined with collegial sharing and support.

It became apparent when identifying themes that some of the themes overlapped and that one was needed for the success of the other. This is displayed in the last three themed groupings.

The first subtheme that emerged from the meeting minute excerpts was academic student support. The OHS SLC teachers had various discussions on academic student supports, detailing how teacher/student relationships were strengthened when the teachers supported student academics in the SLC meetings. For example,

- 08/2008 meeting minutes, “Teachers working with students developing goals for the future.”
- 03/2009 meeting minutes, “Discussed strategies to be implemented before senior year to ensure graduation.”
Table 4.5
Subthemes in Topics Discussed under the Theme of Teacher-Student Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Examples from OHS’s SLC Meeting Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Academic Student Support**          | • Discussed establishing a mentoring program, pairing teachers with at risk students.  
• Monitoring the progress of L35 students in their classes.  
• Developing a homeroom period where the teacher can serve as the advisor and guide the students  
• Teachers are staying in contact with students and parents about grades.  
• AVID program- teacher recommendations for program.                                                                 |
| **Celebrations**                      | • SLC discussed how relationships affect the achievement gap - teachers discussed best practices in developing relationships with students.  
• Freshman pinning ceremony  
• Senior celebration planning  
• Discussed developing a wall of fame for the seniors.  
• SLC discussed ideas to assist the students feel special about their senior year. Possible painting of senior parking spots.  |
| **Academic Student Support & Collegial Sharing & Support** | • Teachers shared interventions that they have been implementing to build relationships with at risk students.  
• Discussions on ways to develop positive relationships with students and share real world situations.  
• Freshman socials  
• PBS/RTI - teachers documenting interactions with students.  
• SLC’s discussed how building relationships with students would assist in learning and closing the achievement gap.  |
| **Celebrations & Academic Student Support** | • Identify ways to recognize student success.  
• Recognizing students for academic success with bars and academic letters.  
• Notes to parents to share positive and not always negative.  
• Discussed implementing an advisory period that would allow teachers to meet with students in a smaller setting and build a relationship.  
• Parent booster clubs to support the students and school.  
• Advisory board meetings held quarterly.  |
| **Celebrations & Collegial Sharing & Support** | • SLC shared how they develop relationships with their students.  
• Informal conversations with struggling students - teachers coached their colleagues on how to start the conversations.  
• 12th grade house discussed ideas to assist the students feel special about their senior year.  
• Medical SLC conducts a 9th grade field trip- this trip helps builds community.  |
- 10/2010 meeting minutes, “Teachers discussed making parent calls to discuss student progress.”
- 01/2012 meeting minutes, “IB SLC agreed to meet an additional day to discuss student progress.”

The teachers at OHS described student academics as the progress they are making in a particular subject and the step necessary by the student, teacher, and parent to work jointly for success.

School size does affect student performance. Cotton (1996) stated, “Interpersonal relationships increase on all levels including student to student, faculty to faculty, administrator-faculty, faculty-student, administrator-student and school-parents” (pp. 4-14). The OHS SLC’s provided a smaller learning environment for the students, and that enabled the teachers to develop and foster relationships with the students that afforded them the opportunity to support student academics.

The second subtheme that emerged from the meeting minute excerpts was teacher-student relationships and celebrations. The teachers discussed various topics throughout the SLC meetings that focused on teacher student relationships and their positive affect on the whole child. Specifically, they discussed: relationships affect the achievement gap, student recognitions, and pinning ceremonies. For example,

- 10/2008 meeting minutes, “Homerooms will be Advisory Periods next year. This year we will be collecting data on what works and doesn’t work.”
- 09/2009 meeting minutes, “talked about new ideas for the Phreshmen Phootball Phrenzy, t-shirts and a tunnel for the varsity to run through.”
• 08/2012 meeting minutes, “Freshman social, we need to have freshman socials two times a year – once a semester.”

The teachers at OHS described recognition as recognizing the students for their positive contributions to OHS. The recognition could come through ceremonies such as freshman pinning ceremony in the IB program.

The premise behind SLC’s is to offer students a smaller learning environment where they can develop relationships and thrive academically. I observed the teachers within the SLC’s working together to share strategies on how to develop relationships with the students. They shared how they connected with the students and how this relationship opened other doors of success for the student. The teachers viewed the celebrations as a time to recognize and honor the students for their hard work and demonstrate how their success supports the whole school.

The third subtheme that emerged was academic student support and collegial sharing and support. The teachers discussed various topics throughout the SLC meetings that focused on collegial sharing and academic student support. For example,

• 12/2009 meeting minutes, “teachers were asked to submit a list of students who were currently at risk of failing the semester. Teachers were reminded to contact parents about potential failures.”

• 02/2010 meeting minutes, “study skills class for 9th grade students could be addressed in the freshman experience course and this would add to the academic experience of the students.”

• 09/2010 meeting minutes, “teaming across grade levels and within subject areas and sharing teaching strategies.”
It appeared these two themes overlapped because the collegial sharing on best practices, homerooms, mentoring of students, pyramid of interventions, and assisting at-risk students transformed into academic student supports put into practice. Collegial sharing greatly impacted the teachers’ implementation of more academic student supports.

The fourth subtheme was teacher-student relationships/celebrations combined with academic student support. The teachers discussed various topics throughout the SLC meetings that focused on teacher-student relationships/celebrations combined with academic student support. It appeared that these two themes overlapped because the teacher-student relationships/celebrations directly affect academic student support. For example,

- 01/2011 meeting minutes, “discussed possibilities for a mentoring program, teacher assigned 1 to 3 students that visit monthly during their planning period. See what the student is learning and how are they doing.”

- 04/2010 meeting minutes, “teachers brain stormed ideas for an end of year activity… ice cream social, maybe something similar to senior breakfast, after school lunch, or picnic. A signing of yearbooks in the café and maybe call it a Books and Bagels Breakfast.”

- 08/2008 meeting minutes, “discussions of teacher, administrator, and student recognition, suggestions included school newspaper, morning announcements, and student of the week.”

Downer, Driscoll, and Pianta (2008), stated “Children who have a more positive student teacher relationship are likely to demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement” (p.291). In addition, Cotton (1996) identified several key observations in relation to student performance and school size, one of which was, “Student academic and general self-regard is higher in small
schools” (pp. 4-14). Academic student support appeared to be a byproduct of teacher-student relationships/celebrations in the OHS SLCs.

The fifth subtheme that emerged was teacher-student relationships/celebrations combined with collegial sharing and support. The teachers discussed various topics throughout the SLC meetings that focused on teacher-student relationships/celebrations combined with collegial sharing and support. For example,

- 08/2009 meeting minutes, “teachers discussed having activities to cultivate more of a class identity. They discussed having a senior calendar to with various important dates. This would provide an opportunity for the teachers to celebrate the students meeting their deadlines.”

- 09/2009 meeting minutes, “teachers discussed the possibility of allowing the seniors to paint their parking spaces, they felt this would help build their class identity.”

- 09/2009 meeting minutes, “the teachers discussed the possibility of creating a wall of fame for the seniors to celebrate students who have been accepted to college or the military.”

It appeared that these two themes overlapped because the teacher-student relationships/celebrations were fostered through collegial sharing and support. The teacher discussions that were recorded in the OHS SLC meeting minutes focused on them sharing various strategies that would build a relationship with students and among teachers, ultimately assisting the students academically. Collegial sharing and support greatly impacted teacher student relationships/celebrations. The impacts I observed as a result of the collegial sharing and support
were student teacher relationships that flourished due to the teachers having a better understanding of their students and the students viewing the teacher as a support not an obstacle.

The third level of analysis focused on district level communication that occurred during the OHS SLC implementation of early release Wednesdays for all students elementary thru high school in Pinellas County Schools. The purpose of the early release Wednesdays was to afford teachers time to plan and collaborate together.

The initiative was met with resistance from the teachers. They were concerned about instructional time and meeting the academic needs of the students since the length of the classes was being shortened, thus giving them less time to instruct the students. The other issue that presented itself was the students’ perception of the abbreviated schedule on Wednesdays. Students viewed this day as a free day.

The teachers collaborated and discussed strategies during the monthly OHS SLC meetings to change the students’ perception of abbreviated Wednesdays. Table 4.6 provides examples of topics discussed in SLC meetings related to district communications about the abbreviated schedule on Wednesdays.

While the teachers did not initially welcome this initiative, they later embraced the idea and chose to work together to ensure the students had a successful learning environment. An unintended positive outcome of the early release Wednesday was the opportunity for teachers to have time with students after school in a non-structured environment. The teachers realized that the students would stay after school to get assistance from their teachers or meet for clubs thus giving the teachers the opportunity to build on their teacher student relationship.
Table 4.6

Examples of Topics Discussed Related to District Communications about Abbreviated Schedule on Wednesday

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Communication</th>
<th>Examples from SLC Meeting Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>• Less time to focus on students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Have less review time – shortened classes = fewer days of instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of instructional time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher questioned how the curriculum could be covered in the shorter periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Possibility of going to an A/B day schedule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>• Lesson planning for shorter class periods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Working with colleagues to build pacing guides for the school year to ensure all curriculum is covered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since I was an active participant, I was involved in the teacher training and professional development opportunities that prevailed on the early release Wednesdays. I observed initially teachers meeting this initiative with resistance but later embracing it and utilizing the time effectively to better their practice and focus on highest student achievement.

As an active participant in the OHS SLC meetings, I felt it was imperative to practice what I valued. I felt it was important to model the respect and relationships with the teachers that the teachers were developing with the students. I took a personal interest in all of the teachers to develop relationships and build a two-way open communication. For example, I was involved in all of the hiring at OHS thus giving the opportunity to build an initial relationship with all of the new teachers. I have an open door policy that allows the teachers the freedom to come and see me to discuss any issues they may be experiencing. I routinely visited the teacher’s classrooms to support the learning taking place and show the teachers they are supported by the administration.
The positive relationship that the teachers have with their administrator transcends into the classroom. The teachers feel that they are valued employees who make daily contributions to the school and community. Goodlad (1984) found that teachers who were “more satisfied” with their jobs, worked in an environment where teachers perceived they had greater influence over their use of time and more control of their jobs. I observed that when the teachers felt valued and heard, there was little to no resistance to the transition into SLCs.

Analysis of Instructional Practice

For the purpose of this study, instructional practice was defined as behaviors, actions, interactions with students, activities, and opportunities provided to students (Parise and Spillane, 2010). The initial level of review within the instructional practice theme revealed topics in what teachers discussed in the SLC meetings. Table 4.7 provides a sample of topics taken from the SLC meeting minutes coded as instructional practice. A complete listing of all the excerpts in this theme is located in Appendix E1. 44 examples of instructional practice were coded in the meeting minutes, representing 30 percent of the total coding’s.

The second level of review identified subthemes that characterized what instructional practices were being implemented and how teachers were working together on instructional practice. Table 4.8 identifies the subthemes that emerged:

- Collegial sharing and support combined with Academic student support,
- Collegial sharing and support, and
- Academic student support.
### Table 4.7

Topics Discussed under the Theme of Instructional Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sub Theme</th>
<th>Excerpts From OHS’s SLC Meeting Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Instructional Practices | • Lesson plans submitted to department chairs each 6 weeks  
 • Progress reports  
 • Administrative walk thru to ensure curriculum delivery meeting the needs of the student  
 • J Report was distributed and discussed indicating students most recent FCAT and SRI Lexile scores - this information was used to support student success in the classroom  
 • Richard DuFour’s 3 questions for student growth  
 • Discussed specific strategies to address the L25 students  
 • Preparing for FCAT - Higher order thinking into all classes, familiarity with test item format, focus on main idea, strive to use higher level of Bloom’s taxonomy  
 • Discussed academic settings for students with chronic absenteeism  
 • Discussed summer program to assist 9th grade students acclimate to HS  
 • Discussed various schedule types for next school year - discussed the pluses and deltas of the various schedules to determine which one supports highest student performance  
 • RTI - Interventions for tier 1 and 2 students  
 • Discussed how to improve high school and students academic success |

It became apparent when identifying themes that some of the themes overlapped and that one was needed for the success of the other.
Table 4.8

Subthemes in Topics Discussed under the Theme of Instructional Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Examples from SLC Meeting Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collegial Sharing &amp; Support &amp; Academic</td>
<td>• Lesson plans submitted to dept. chairs each 6 weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Support</td>
<td>• Administrative walk thru to ensure curriculum delivery is meeting the needs of the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Richard DuFour’s 3 questions for student growth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed specific strategies to address the L25 students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Preparing for FCAT - higher order thinking into all classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial Sharing &amp; Support</td>
<td>• Reading plans to encourage reading across curriculums.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SLC’s discussed how to build unity and purpose for the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed FLDOE’s new graduation requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Medical SLC conducted grade level discussions to meet the academic needs of the students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SLC discussed how they have the students interact with new knowledge and support the lessons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Student Support</td>
<td>• J Report was distributed and discussed students FCAT and SRI data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Progress reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed academic settings for students with chronic absenteeism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed how to improve high schools and student academic success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed being proactive to address at risk students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first subtheme that emerged from the meeting minute excerpts was collegial sharing and support combined with academic student support. Here teacher discussions focused on instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance. Collegial
conversation detailed various academic student supports that were infused to support highest student achievement. For example,

- 09/2009 meeting minutes, “teachers discussed struggling students work and shared best practices they found to be successful with the students.”
- 04/2010 meeting minutes, “teachers asked to discuss at risk students to determine if there may be students that a teacher has a connection with that they could touch base with the student informally.”
- 09/2010 meeting minutes, “the teachers identified and developed interventions to assist struggling students.”

As an active participant in the OHS SLC meetings, I observed the teachers routinely share best practices and offer support to their colleagues to better their craft. For example, during walk-throughs of classrooms I observed teachers utilizing strategies that their colleagues shared with them to support learning in the classroom. I also observed teachers providing their colleagues the opportunity to observe their teaching in their classroom to gain ideas to implement in their classroom. I believe this collegiality directed impacted academic student support. Good teachers make good students.

The second subtheme that emerged was collegial sharing and support. Collegial sharing and support was seen in teacher discussions that focused on instructional strategies and practices to improve academic performance. Collegial conversations detailed: reading plans, new graduation requirements, supporting continuous learning over the summer, and academic coaching. For example,
• 08/2007 meeting minutes, “teachers discussed lesson planning and the best format to capture the required fields: SSS standards and benchmarks, goals and objectives, ESE accommodations, and assessments.”

• 09/2008 meeting minutes, “teachers discussed the L35 students and the various interventions to support their academic success in the classroom, mentoring, and bell ringer activities.”

• 10/2008 meeting minutes, “core group of teachers will meet with the middle school teachers to share the high school’s expectations for rising 9th grade students.”

Collegial sharing is a crucial element to support instructional strategies and practices to improve academic performance. I observed teachers teaming together to plan their lessons to best meet the academic needs of the students in their classes. The teachers routinely asked to have the subject area supervisor to sit in on their PLC’s to ensure they were on pace and utilizing appropriate best practices.

The third subtheme that emerged was academic student support. Academic student support was seen in teacher discussions that focused specifically on instructional strategies and practices to improve academic performance. In the OHS SLC meetings the teachers discussed various academic supports for the students. The academic supports ranged from communicating with parents, mentoring students, parent conference, and the implementation of a 9th grade study skills class. For example,

• 09/2009 meeting minutes, “the teachers discussed the freshman experience class and how it can be utilized as an academic support for the 9th grade students.”
• 10/2009 meeting minutes, “teachers discussed academic success plans for the students. This would allow the teacher to provide or find support for the student who was experiencing academic struggles in their classes.”

• 02/2010 meeting minutes, “teachers discussed various teaching strategies to support the students and prepare them for the upcoming FCAT test. They suggested to their colleagues to include analysis questions and various writings into their curriculum, vocabulary building, context clues in reading assignments, and identification or main idea.”

As an active observer in the OHS SLC meetings, I witnessed teachers providing professional development to their colleagues to support student academic success. For example, I observed teachers opening their classrooms to their colleagues to observe their teaching styles and best practices. The teachers would plan together on their planning periods and also learn from each other expertise. I believe the academic student supports that were collaboratively discussed and implemented supported improved academic performance.

The three subthemes that emerged from the OHS SLC meeting minutes’ excerpts suggested that teachers had various conversations that focused on instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance.

A third level of review was conducted on District level communications that occurred during implementation of a seven period day in all high schools and the implementation of early release Wednesdays for all students elementary thru high school. Both of these District initiatives were implemented to improve student academic performance.

The seven period day initiative was met with opposition from the teachers. The teachers felt they were being told to teach an additional period without a pay increase; they were also upset
because their teaching periods would be shortened to accommodate the seventh period. This initiative was implemented to offer students the ability to earn an additional half credit every semester. It also afforded students the opportunity to make up a credit or take an additional course. Many discussions centered on this topic during the OHS SLC meetings. Table 4.9 provides examples of topics discussed in SLC meetings related to district communications about the seven period day.

Table 4.9
Examples of Topics Discussed Related to District Communications about the Seven Period Day

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Communication</th>
<th>Examples from SLC Meeting Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Email                                | • Less time to focus on students  
• Have less review time – shortened classes = fewer days of instruction  
• Loss of instructional time  
• Teacher questioned how the curriculum could be covered in the shorter periods |
| School Board Meeting Minutes         | • Lesson planning for shorter class periods.  
• Working with colleagues to build pacing guides for the school year to ensure all curriculum is covered. |

As principal and researcher I recall many conversations during the SLC meetings that focused on preparing for the implementation of the seven periods day schedule. For example, I observed the teachers mapping out the curriculum to ensure they covered the appropriate standards in the shortened class periods. I also recall the teachers working together to develop lessons that maximized their teaching during the shorter class periods. While this initiative was not popular or welcomed by the teachers, they appeared to work together to ensure the students had a successful learning environment that focused on highest student achievement.

The District also implemented early release Wednesdays for all students elementary thru high school. The purpose of the early release Wednesdays was to allow teachers time to plan and
collaborate together. This initiative was also met with some resistance from the teachers due to the length of the classes being shortened thus giving them less time to instruct the students. The other issue that presented itself was the students’ perception of the abbreviated schedule on Wednesdays. Students viewed this day as a free day. Table 4.10 provides examples of topics discussed in SLC meetings related to district communications about the abbreviated schedule on Wednesdays.

Table 4.10
Examples of Topics Discussed Related to District Communications about Abbreviated Schedule on Wednesday

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Communication</th>
<th>Examples from SLC Meeting Minutes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Loss of instructional time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Teacher questioned how the curriculum could be covered in a the shorter periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board</td>
<td>• Lesson planning for shorter class periods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Minutes</td>
<td>• Working with colleagues to build pacing guides for the school year to ensure all curriculum is covered.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teachers collaborated during the SLC meetings to change the students’ perception of abbreviated Wednesdays. For example, I observed teachers utilizing the abbreviate class periods on Wednesdays to provide enrichment to the curriculum they were covering in class. They also gained student input to ensure they were meeting the needs of the students and to alter their perception of the abbreviated Wednesday schedule.

While the teachers did not initially welcome this initiative, they later embraced the idea and chose to work together to ensure the students had a successful learning environment. This additional planning time afforded by the early release on Wednesdays afforded teachers another
opportunity to discuss and make adjustments to meet the students’ academic needs and increase student academic performance.

I was an active participant in the OHS SLC meetings and observed the teachers routinely grapple with strategies to assist the students academically. My presence at the meetings let the teachers know they are supported during the SLC transition process. A key outcome of being an active participant was I was able to hear the teachers’ wants and needs to be successful in the classroom. This insight allowed me to support the teacher’s monetarily and purchase the curriculum or classroom items they needed to be successful in the classroom. For example, the teachers discussed ways to engage their students and keep them on task, I supported this effort by purchasing the several smart clickers that allowed the teacher to pose questions to the class and the class to respond and collect data instantly. I routinely shared with the department heads and teachers that if they feel they need something to be successful in their classroom that I will try and find the monies to purchase the resources they need.

This support was two-fold, it made the teachers feel valued and that students’ academic needs are also being met. I built a level of trust and support with the teachers of OHS knew I would do whatever it took to make them and their students successful. This value and support alleviated resistance and barriers to the implementation of SLCs.

Summary

This chapter presented findings from content analysis of meeting minutes of SLCs at Owl High School over a six-year period of implementation of the SLC’s at OHS. Meeting minutes were analyzed focusing on how the implementation influenced teacher collegiality, teacher-
student relationships, and instructional practice. Themes and subthemes emerged during the content analysis and interpretation of excerpts from the OHS SLC meeting minutes.

The six years of OHS SLC’s meeting minutes provided sufficient details to capture the emergence and growth of the SLC’s and to illustrate the influence of the implementation of SLCs on teachers, as well as the influence of teachers on each other and on their students. The next chapter interprets these findings in relation to the conceptual framework of this study, related literature, and methodological stance. In addition, chapter 5 presents conclusions and limitations of this study, implications for further investigation, and insights into potential pitfalls and possibilities in implementing whole school educational change like small learning communities.
Chapter Five

Conclusions and Recommendations

When NCLB’s appropriateness as a one-size-fits-all approach to school reform was questioned, President Obama reauthorized ESEA as the Blueprint for Reform Act. Within the reauthorization, the Race to the Top competitive grant program targeted teacher evaluation, alternative pathways to the teaching profession, development of public charter schools, and additional options for State intervention into schools that perform poorly (Manna, 2010).

Of increasing interest has been the movement to smaller school contexts, including small learning communities (SLCs) which are separately defined, individualized learning units within a larger school setting. Students and teachers are scheduled together and frequently have a common area of the school in which to hold most or all of their classes (Sammon, 2000). SLCs encompass elements of organization around houses or career academies, while intensifying focus on learning and the learner (Oxley, 2005). The U.S. Department of Education (2011) recognized SLCs as an education reform vehicle aimed at supporting and increasing student achievement.

The purpose of this study was to understand one aspect of educational change, the implementation of SLCs, at a single high school located in Pinellas County, Florida by examining six years of grade level SLC meeting minutes to explore how the implementation of SLC’s influenced teacher collegiality, student teacher relationships, and instructional practices related to improving student academic outcomes.
The primary research question was: How do the teachers at the high school focus their efforts to improve student achievement through SLC reform? The three sub-questions guided exploration of the primary questions:

1. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher collegiality in their SLC meetings?
2. In what ways did teachers discuss teacher student relationships in their SLC meetings?
3. In what ways did teachers discuss instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance in their SLC meetings?

This study was situated in case study and document analysis research perspectives. Case study is useful for helping us to understand what, how and why things occur with people, places, programs and events (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). This study described the implementation of small learning communities (SLCs) in a single high school (Owl High School). The SLCs at OHS consist of a medical SLC, an IB (International Baccalaureate) SLC, and an SLC at each grade level 9 through 12 for the students not enrolled in a magnet program. The SLCs meet once a month and discuss program and grade level appropriate information. Teachers also utilize this time to discuss students that they have in common and best practices to support students’ academic success.

OHS SLC meeting minutes were the primary data source. The minutes represented the six years of SLC meetings in effect when the study took place in 2012-2013. Documents are a “record of human activity” created as people engage in “ongoing day-to-day activities” and can be a valuable data source in case study (Olson, 2010, p. 318). Document analysis involves skimming, reading and interpretation to understand the meaning of the themes and patterns across text excerpts/passage selected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Fereday & Muir-Cochrane,
Content analysis was the method of analysis utilized to analyze the documents in this case study.

Chapter 4 presented the themes and subthemes that emerged in the content analysis of the 700 pages of SLC meeting minutes recorded over a six-year period of SLC implementation. This chapter interprets these findings in relation to the conceptual framework of this study, related literature, and methodological stance. In addition, chapter 5 presents conclusions and limitations of this study, implications for further investigation, and insights into potential pitfalls and possibilities in implementing whole school educational change like small learning communities.

**Conceptual Framework Revisited**

The conceptual framework for this study (see Figure 5.1 below) is grounded in the notion that adoption of educational reform is a difficult task. With reform comes challenges that can either derail the reform process or help the school grow and learn through the process. Small learning communities (SLCs) are intended to change the ways in which teachers work together to focus collectively and collaboratively on student academic success. Increased teacher collegiality is perceived as likely to influence the ways teachers think about their students and their needs, and the ways in which teachers relate to students as learners. What teachers learn about each other, and about their students and their needs, is perceived as likely to support teachers’ willingness to change instructional practices and learn from them.

How a reform gets implemented through ordinary, everyday practices is not always clear. In the case school it was expected that teachers would meet regularly in their SLCs, talk about their students and their instructional practices, and make decisions about what is best practice to support student academic success. Thus, the nature of the dialogue in which teachers engaged in
their SLC meetings was important, as well as the decisions they made and why they made them.

This supports focusing on the SLC meeting minutes as the primary data source.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5.1.** Representation of the conceptual framework of the study

A secondary data source, communications from the District regarding reform initiatives to be concurrently implemented, provided additional insight into the influence of the District communications on the SLC discussions and conversations. Teachers’ reactions to the District’s announcements of the implementation of other reform initiatives on top of the SLC initiative were often less than supportive. Conversations that had gained momentum in SLC meetings might be side-stepped or delayed as teachers worked through the implications of a new District initiative.

Figure 5.2 reflects how the findings of the study have informed the initial conceptual framework on which the study was based. Initially, it appeared that the three major themes –
teacher collegiality, teacher-student relationships, and instructional practices – would drive the process, dialogue and decisions of the SLCs. The findings suggest that the process, dialogue and decisions of the SLCs shaped the three major themes and their interactions, providing greater insight into how all three themes resulted in teacher perspectives, decisions and actions aimed at influencing student achievement.

**Figure 5.2. Revised representation of the conceptual framework of the study**

**Discussion of Findings in SLC Meeting Minutes**

In the following sections the findings related to each of the three themes based on the research sub-questions are discussed, seeking to illuminate how the three themes of teacher
collegiality, student-teacher relationship, and instructional practice were represented and interacted. Each theme is also situated within the literature reviewed for this study.

**Teacher Collegiality**

For the purposes of this study, teacher collegiality was defined as teachers working together to collaboratively solve problems of practice as a community of learner to foster school-wide collaboration and conversation. Hoerr (1996) noted, “Collegiality stems from discussions about students, instruction, and curriculum” (p.3). Five subthemes within the theme of teacher collegiality emerged from the OHS SLC meeting minute excerpts:

- Collegial sharing and support
- Academic student support
- Professional development
- Future planning
- Collegial sharing and support combined with academic student support

These subthemes provide evidence that the teachers had collegial conversations during the SLC meetings. Through these conversations teachers learned from their colleagues and worked together to improve their craft and provide a learning environment for the students that is focused on academic success.

**Collegial sharing and support.** Excerpts from the SLC meeting minutes showed that teachers shared lesson plan formats, supported each other during evaluation, collaboratively developed classroom processes, and collaboratively discussed student motivation and mentoring.
**Academic student support.** Teachers’ collegial discussions looked at structures (e.g., school schedule), processes (e.g., homeroom procedures, RTI processes), curriculum (e.g., freshman experience), and behavior interventions (e.g., teacher responses to student behaviors).

**Professional development.** SLC meeting minutes reflected conversations about training experiences related to ESE disabilities, individual professional development plans, and peer training opportunities.

**Future planning.** Not only did teachers discuss current school and classroom practices in the SLC meetings, but also plans for the next school year (e.g., house meetings, teacher goals).

**Collegial learning and support combined with academic student support.** Sometimes two subthemes would interact. Issues that were raised in teachers’ collegial sharing (e.g., discussion of teachers’ challenges and strategies in handling student behaviors) would result in academic supports needed outside the classroom (e.g., parent involvement and strategies for communication with parents).

**Connections to Literature Reviewed**

The literature supports that teacher collegiality is a natural by-product of SLC reform. Teachers’ perception of their involvement in school reform rests with the school principal (Liontos, 1994). When teachers gather and identify issues and develop agreed upon outcomes, they *own* the decisions. In turn, they will become an active member of the implementation process. Daft and Lengel (1998, 2000) described the importance of principals who provide teachers the opportunity to become “inspired rather than controlled. Leaders develop others by showing the way to vision, courage, heart, communication, mindfulness, and integrity” (p. 56). This act of empowering and utilizing the strengths of teachers is coined ‘leadership density.’
is very important for the principal to validate and respect teachers’ decisions and actions when they take on various leadership roles in the school.

One of the SLCs at OHS, for example, decided as a group that it would “benefit them to have two meetings per month, it’s a beneficial way to keep up with student progress and keep our identity.” This decision mirrors Daft and Lengel’s perspective. Teachers were not told to meet twice a month; they decided that it would be to their benefit, and students’ benefit, so they could track students’ progress.

Teacher perceptions are very influential in the success of any change strategy. It is crucial that the principal knows the abilities and skill sets of the teachers in order to utilize their strengths and knowledge in leadership opportunities like SLCs. It is more important that teachers recognize that their knowledge and strengths are being validated and respected through opportunities for their active ownership of decisions made in a change process.

Teacher-Student Relationships

For the purposes of this study, teacher-student relationships were defined as caring, authentic connections, support and interdependence between students and teachers in a learning environment (Pianta, Hamre, & Allen, 2012). “Children who have a more positive student teacher relationship are likely to demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement” (Downer, Driscoll, & Pianta, 2008, p. 291).

Six subthemes emerged from the OHS SLC meeting minute excerpts related to teacher-student relationships:

- Academic student support
- Teacher-student relationships/celebrations
• Parent/community support
• Academic student support combined with collegial sharing and support
• Teacher-student relationships/celebrations combined with academic student support
• Teacher-student relationships/celebrations combined with collegial sharing and support

These subthemes provide evidence that teachers discussed teacher-student relationships during SLC meetings. The development of teacher-student relationships is critical to the success of both student and teacher. The student thrives because they have developed a relationship with a teacher, and the teacher gains a different perspective from this relationship that may influence the decisions that the teacher makes regarding student learning and supporting academic success.

**Academic student support.** In this subtheme teachers talked about ways that student academic success could be supported. Topics included, for example, establishing a mentoring program pairing teachers with at risk students and developing a homeroom period where teachers might act as advisors.

**Celebrations.** Teachers discussed a freshman pinning ceremony and a wall of fame to recognize the accomplishments of seniors.

**Parent/community support.** A couple of conversations were around how parent booster clubs might support student and school success.

**Celebrations and academic student support.** Some SLC conversations illustrated teachers’ making connections between celebrations and academic student support. For example, teachers talked about identifying ways in which student success could be recognized through new school initiatives like academic letters and positive communications to parents.
Celebrations and collegial sharing and support. SLC conversations also illustrated how teachers were including sharing of ideas and strategies they had been trying to celebrate and reward student success (e.g., initiating informal conversations with struggling students to help them identify their strengths, involving students in conversations about ways in which their accomplishments can be recognized).

Connections to Literature Reviewed

Reflecting on the literature on SLCs, teacher student relationships were a by-product of the implementation of SLCs as an educational reform effort. SLCs serve as the platform for deeper school reform by improving relationships and process (Gladden, 1998). From 1985 to 2000, creating a sense of community in large high schools fused with national pressure to improve educational outcomes to produce district-wide mandates to reorganize high schools into smaller units (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). By 2000, the organization of large high schools into SLCs had become a national reform movement (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). Multi-million-dollar school reform projects were funded by The U.S. Department of Education under the Clinton Administration (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008). The projects required small unit size as a feature.

“In 1999, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Small Learning Community Program to support schools with more than 1,000 students to implement small learning community structures” (Oxley & Kassissieh, 2008, p. 201). Visher, Teitelbaum, and Emanuel (1999) reported SLCs “promote increased student learning such as collegiality among teachers, and personalized teacher student relationships” (p. 21). SLCs create the conditions for teachers to work in a different way with students and to effect curricular and instructional improvements.
The premise behind SLC’s is to offer students smaller learning environments that afford them a better opportunity to learn and build relationships with their teachers. This smaller environment helps the teachers better meet the academic needs of their students. Increased teacher student relationships are equally benefiting to the student and teacher. Both parties gain from the positive relationship. The benefits range from academic performance, social connections, increased attendance, focus on post-secondary options, and desire for better life choices and options. Increased teacher student relationships have numerous positive effects that start with the implementation of SLC’s and evolve into a highly functioning educational institution.

This particular case study produced data that tied the implementation of SLCs on the campus of OHS to increased teacher-student relationships. Increased teacher-student relationships were evidenced in the development of “two freshmen (9th grade) socials that would incorporate a tailgate atmosphere with students and teachers.” This event provided teachers and students a more relaxed atmosphere prior to a sporting event to eat pizza and participate in various games. Another example of increasing teacher and student relationships was the implementation of “mentors for the at risk students, teachers would meet bi-weekly with mentee to check on their academic progress and provide support as needed.” The implementation of mentors directly impacted the teacher-student relationships.

There were many positive outcomes that I observed as a result of the teachers mentoring the students. One of the obvious outcomes was the students felt as though they had a go to person on campus that would support them and guide them through their high school years. The mentor also acted as the students advocate to provide support and assistance when needed. I observed teachers reaching out to their colleagues to discuss the students they were mentoring to make sure they were meeting their academic and social needs.
An unintended positive outcome that I observed from teacher/student mentoring was students referring their friends to their teacher mentors to receive guidance and support. Students were endorsing their mentor teachers to their friends and their friends were seeking the teachers out to have academic questions answered. This was a positive academic side effect that was not predicted.

The findings of this study align with current literature on educational reform efforts. While reform efforts may vary based on the students and institution, the focus remains on increasing student achievement and doing whatever is necessary to have students achieve at their highest level. Strong teacher-student relationships are, according to the literature and reflected here, a key component to student success.

**Instructional Practices**

For the purpose of this study, instructional practice was defined as behaviors, actions, interactions with students, activities, and opportunities provided to students (Parise & Spillane, 2010). Three subthemes emerged from the OHS SLC meeting minute excerpts:

- Collegial sharing and support combined with Academic student support,
- Collegial sharing and support
- Academic student support

The subthemes provide evidence that the teachers discussed instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance during SLC meetings. The presence of discussions/conversations about instructional strategies and practices is vital to the success of the students and school. If the teachers are not sharing and learning from each other, teaching
methodology will become stagnant, thus potentially affecting students’ academic performance negatively.

**Collegial sharing and support and academic student support.** At times teachers’ conversations focused on sharing their ideas and practices and supporting each other in trying out strategies aimed at academic student support. In some cases, teachers made connections to other academic support functions in the school. Teachers discussed, for example, submission of lesson plans to department chairs, administrative classroom walkthroughs, and preparing students for FCAT items that require demonstration of higher order thinking.

**Collegial sharing and support.** Teachers often shared specific instructional practices in the SLC meetings (e.g., reading across the curriculum plans, strategies for students’ initial interaction with new knowledge).

**Academic student support.** SLCs discussed reports of students’ FCAT and SRI data, progress reports, and academic settings that are more supportive for students with chronic absenteeism.

**Connections to literature reviewed**

Improving student learning is tied to teacher learning, and the ultimate payoff of teachers learning is their commitment to work together to improve student instruction (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Smaller learning environments enable teachers to build closer relationships with students and colleagues. These relationships support higher student achievement and graduation rates. In addition to positive student outcomes, teachers also gain valuable learning experiences from their colleagues that support teacher learning and instructional change. Teacher learning communities appeared in this case to be a by-product of the SLCs.
Each SLC house had an exceptional education teacher (ESE) assigned to the house. The ESE teacher provided a brief professional development session for their colleagues each meeting to assist teachers with the various student accommodations that ESE students in their classes might need. This opportunity provided colleagues to learn from each other, and the by-product is a more supportive learning environment for the ESE students in their classrooms. As another example, during each SLC meeting teachers would discuss students who may be experiencing difficulty academically or behaviorally. Their colleagues who shared the same students would provide feedback on strategies they implemented into their classrooms and where they have experienced success with students being discussed. This open dialogue in the protected SLC environment provided teachers a safe place to discuss openly areas where they needed assistance.

School systems, school personnel, and even the school facility are continuously adapting and changing to meet the needs of society and the student (Sarason & Sarason, 1996). Sarason argued that schools have been and continue to be “a sensitive barometer of diverse changes in the larger society…and schools have inevitably responded or were forced to respond to this or that discrete aspect” (p. 376). With knowledge of past practitioners, we “seek to build on their work in light of the social and economic realities of our time, and help schools and the communities they serve become better able to meet the complex challenges of the future” (Lieberman, 2005, p. 7).

Literature supports the importance of teachers discussing instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance in order for teachers to flourish in their profession and improve student academic performance. SLC meeting minutes indicated conversations focused on instructional strategies and practices to improve student academic performance during and through the implementation of SLC’s at OHS.
Analysis of Findings in Relation to District Communications about Reform Initiatives

The secondary data source, communications from the District regarding reform initiatives to be concurrently implemented, provided additional insight into the influence of the District communications on the SLC discussions and conversations. Teachers’ reactions to the District’s announcements of the implementation of other reform initiatives on top of the SLC initiative were often less than supportive. Conversations that had gained momentum in SLC meetings might be side-stepped or delayed as teachers worked through the implications of a new District initiative.

**Teacher collegiality.** The implementation of a seven period day in all high schools was intended to increase student achievement. The initiative offered students the ability to earn an additional half credit every semester. It also afforded students the opportunity to make up a credit or take an additional course.

Despite the intent, teachers felt they were being told to teach an additional period without a pay increase. They were also upset because their teaching periods would be shortened to accommodate the seventh period. Many discussions centered on this topic during the OHS SLC meetings.

Teachers talked about the transition to a seven period day decreasing student time in the classroom and resulting in fewer days of instruction. Teachers were concerned about how this would affect the students academically. Discussions about the seven period day occurred in the house meetings, and the change was not widely accepted at first. For example, meeting minutes noted, “this initiative would decrease class time thus decreasing the time they are in front of the students. They feared this may affect the students learning.” Meeting minutes also noted, “the seven period day concerned the teachers in the grade level SLC because they felt their
curriculum would be rushed and not given the appropriate time needed to deliver it effectively.” While teachers were not supportive of the seven period day initially, the initiative created another opportunity for the teachers to work together to adjust their teaching and provide a learning environment focused on academic achievement. Teachers worked together to develop pacing guides, for example, to ensure they would meet the academic needs of their students. Subject area supervisors in the District brought teachers together to discuss curriculum and best practices providing teachers opportunity to work collaboratively with their colleagues at the school and around the District.

**Teacher-student relationship.** The implementation of early release Wednesdays for all students elementary thru high school was intended to afford teachers time to plan and collaborate together. Despite the intent teachers were concerned about instructional time and meeting the academic needs of the students since the length of the classes was being shortened, thus giving them less time to instruct the students. The other issue that presented itself was the students’ perception of the abbreviated schedule on Wednesdays. Students viewed this day as a free day.

These perceptions and concerns would tend to derail some teachers from the focus of the SLC meetings. The focus of their discussions would deviate from the agenda and students to the perceptions and personal feelings of the addition of the abbreviated Wednesdays.

While teachers were not supportive of the early release Wednesdays initially, the initiative created additional time at the end of the school day and provided another opportunity for the teachers to build teacher student relationships. The addition of the abbreviated Wednesday lent itself to supporting the SLC concept of teacher collegiality and building relationships with the students and staff. During the SLC meetings teachers observed that “abbreviated Wednesdays provide us opportunity to provide additional support/tutoring for our
students, and build collegial relationships with our colleagues.” The principal would arrange staff luncheons and community building activities on a few of the abbreviated Wednesdays. This structure allowed teachers to meet and talk with colleagues they may not normally interact with on a daily basis. This time enabled teachers to identify additional support and professional development needed, and the principal could then arrange additional professional development opportunities for faculty and staff on the abbreviated Wednesdays.

**Instructional practices.** Both of these District initiatives, the seven period day in all high schools and the early release Wednesdays in elementary, middle and high schools, were implemented to improve student academic performance. Teachers, however, saw both initiatives as potentially having a negative impact on their instructional time. To accommodate both initiatives, teaching periods would be shortened. District implementation of both initiatives provided teachers with opportunity to further discuss instructional practices and routines. OHS teachers worked together to support and encourage each other in and out of the classroom. During the OHS SLC meetings the agenda always had dedicated time for the teachers to collaborate and learn from each other. This learning sometimes carried over past the meetings into their classrooms and conversations. They dedicated time, for example, to plan and develop pacing guides to best meet the academic needs of their students. They utilized various resources to carry student learning beyond the four walls of the classroom. Many teachers embraced technology and utilized it to engage the students when they are not in class. The teachers record their lessons and post them to the district online portal; they also provide other supportive resources on this portal to assist the students with their learning. The teachers maintained their focus on highest student achievement.
Connections to Literature Reviewed

Education reform literature embraces the premise that the school’s mission and vision must align to the District’s vision and mission to ensure the academic success of the students. Dufour and Eaker (1998) share five characteristics of productive professional learning communities: “shared mission, vision, and values, collective inquiry, collaborative teams, action orientation and experimentation, continuous improvement, and results orientation” (p.25-29). A successful reform effort must have a shared mission and vision to ensure all schools and stakeholders are aligned and working towards the same goal.

OHS demonstrated these five characteristics in various ways and forms. The OHS SLC meeting minutes’ state the mission and vision on the top of the form to keep this information in the forefront of each group’s mind as they met monthly. This information helps guide them in their thought processes. The nature of the SLC lends itself to collective inquiry in the building of shared knowledge and learning together. The groups function as collaborative teams that constantly are learning from their colleagues and the students. They are action oriented and take the necessary steps to provide highest student achievement, as illustrated in teams’ collaborative planning and preparations to implement the 7th period day and abbreviated Wednesdays. OHS regularly reviews its processes for continuous improvement. This provides teachers the structure and support to focus on results and adjust as necessary to meet the needs of the students. This continuous improvement process was a major force in the success of the SLCs.

Participant-Observer Reflections on the Three Themes

I am currently principal at OHS and served in an administrative capacity during the SLC reform process. Teachers recorded the grade level SLCs meeting minutes. The meetings were not
digitally recorded, so I acknowledge that the minutes may omit additional conversation or may have some inaccuracies. However, as a participant and observer in the process, I observed many meetings and had many interactions with teachers during the SLC reform, and I am relying on my recollections of and reflections on those experiences to provide a personal perspective on the three themes, complementary to the text actually recorded in the meeting minutes,

**Teacher collegiality.** Hoerr (1996) states, “When the principal actually takes part in the meetings, he or she demonstrates that collegiality is valued” (p.3). By my active participation, I believe I demonstrated collegiality. Teachers saw me as one of the group; this enabled me to make key observations that supported teachers’ collegial conversations during SLC meetings. When teachers became bogged down on curriculum questions, for example, I was able to provide support and refocus them on the issue that the group was working to resolve. I was also able to serve to as a quick sounding board on potential ideas they were entertaining. During a discussion on the lowest 25% and meeting their academic needs, I was able to refocus their conversation on best practices that would support the lowest 25th percentile and benefit the other students in the class as well. In listening to their needs for professional development in data collection to monitor their student with more efficiency, I was able to arrange profession development for the teachers in this area.

**Relationships.** The premise behind educational change is to educate teachers on a new system/curriculum to meet the ever-changing academic needs of students. If the teachers do not bond and learn from each other, the change process will not operate effectively or efficiently. Teacher collegiality also affects the climate and culture of the school. If the teachers feel they have a support system with their colleagues, they will operate with a better sense of worth and
commitment, thus positively affecting the climate and culture of the school or educational institution.

As an active participant in the OHS SLC meetings, I modeled respect and validated both teachers’ collegial relationships and the relationships teachers were developing with their students. I was able to support teachers’ professional growth and plans by supporting their desire to attend a training or seek professional development in a particular area (e.g., various teachers attended AVID training and College Board Advance Placement training to prepare for the next year).

I also found one of the key elements in building relationships was recognizing your colleagues for the amazing work they have done and continue to accomplish. This enables them to be spotlighted in front of their colleagues and provides opportunity for their colleagues to get to know them better. Every faculty meeting, for example, I start and end the meeting by thanking the teachers for their countless hours of dedication and commitment to education and the students. I also take time to congratulate teachers that have achieved something since the last meeting. In addition, I make an effort to get to know all of my faculty and staff personally and have conversations with them about their families and lives.

Goodlad (1984) found that teachers who were “more satisfied” with their jobs worked in an environment where teachers perceived they had greater influence over their use of time and more control of their jobs. I observed that when the teachers felt valued and believed they were being heard, there was little to no resistance to the transition into SLCs.

Furthermore, when the District implemented additional reform initiatives (e.g., seven period day, early release Wednesdays) on top of the SLC reform, I believe teachers’ relationships with each other and the commitment they were developing through relationships with their
students, provided support and stability that helped them to work through initial concerns and find for themselves ways to accommodate these new changes.

**Instructional Practice.** A key advantage of being an active participant and observer in the SLC meetings was that I was able to hear teachers’ wants and needs – what they believed they needed to be successful in the classroom. This insight allowed me to support teachers monetarily and purchase the curriculum or classroom items they needed. This support was two-fold: it made teachers feel valued, and students’ academic needs were also being met. I believe that the administrative supports and resources provided to the teachers confirmed for them their value and alleviated resistance and barriers to the implementation of SLCs.

**Connections to Literature Reviewed**

The three primary themes – teacher collegiality, teacher student relationships, and instructional practices – sometimes functioned in isolation and sometimes functioned together. A Gates Foundation study (Evan et al., 2006) looked at 50 schools and found more positive climates in the new smaller schools, including more personalized relationships for students and collegiality among teachers, compared with traditional comprehensive high schools. The Gates study also found that relationships for students and collegiality among teacher’s function simultaneously in SLC’s.

Daft and Lengel (1998, 2000) described the importance of principals who provide teachers the opportunity to become “inspired rather than controlled. Leaders develop others by showing the way to vision, courage, heart, communication, mindfulness, and integrity” (p. 56). The implementation of SLCs at OHS provided the platform for teachers to have collegial conversations. This platform/opportunity for the teachers “inspired rather that controlled.” The
SLCs empowered teachers and utilized the strengths of teachers’ collegial relationships to build their leadership in instructional change.

It is very important for administrators to validate and respect teachers taking on various leadership roles in the school. The SLC reform also forced district and school administrators to provide the structure and resources for teachers to function in the SLCs. Teacher perceptions are very influential in the success of any change strategy. When teachers feel valued and supported by relationships and tangible resources, they are more likely to work through reform initiatives, even if they resist them initially.

Perie and Baker (1997) examined job satisfaction among America’s teachers. The teachers answered the following question: “How do public school teachers’ attitudes and perceptions of the workplace relate to their level of satisfaction?” The teachers surveyed identified principal interaction, teacher participation in school decision making, and influence over school policy as among the factors more closely associated with teacher satisfaction. The survey data identified that teachers feel more supported at their workplace when the school administration is involved and teachers have decision-making power.

This literature supports the findings of this study in relation to empowering teachers to take the lead and develop a structure that focuses and supports highest student achievement. Each SLC meeting the teachers would discuss students who were struggling academically or were experiencing attendance issues. The teachers worked together to address the academic needs of the students that were struggling. For students with attendance issues the teachers reached out to their parents to gain their support in getting the students to school. During the SLC meetings teachers routinely discussed best practices. Teachers learned from each other and observed each other to support highest student achievement.
The principal and District serve as a support system to help guide the academic process, but as Smith (2008) observes, change is ever present in the field of education. School systems, school personnel, and even the school facility are continuously adapting and changing to meet the needs of society and the student (Sarason & Sarason, 1996). Schools have been and continue to be “a sensitive barometer of diverse changes in the larger society…and schools have inevitably responded or were forced to respond to this or that discrete aspect” (p. 376). Lieberman (2005) further notes that with knowledge of past practitioners, we “seek to build on their work in light of the social and economic realities of our time, and help schools and the communities they serve become better able to meet the complex challenges of the future” (p. 7).

School districts and principals recognize that schools will and must change. Often educational change is implemented, and there is fall out from teachers, parents, and students. This usually is accompanied with a plan that may not be well thought out or may not have appropriately considered the audience. Fullan and Miles (1992) said “change is a journey,” and like any journey, change must be researched, have a clear plan of action, have buy-in from all interested parties, and have a purpose that is well presented (p. 749). Change will always be present in education, and resistance will be a constant battle that will have to be overcome to successfully implement the change process (Shapiro, 2009).

In this specific case, OHS’s SLC implementation was viewed by the teachers and administration on different levels. The administration at the time was very familiar with the SLC concept and the growing pains associated with implementation. The administration viewed the implementation as successful for the students and faculty. If the administration would not have had the previous knowledge and experience, I feel that the SLC process at OHS would have taken longer to develop. From the teacher’s view point there were many growing pains and aaha
moments during the implementation period. The plan to implement the SLCs was developed with the teachers and administration. This joint process allowed all stakeholders to be involved in the process and develop by in. The administration presented the concept of SLCs to the faculty and staff to gain their knowledgebase and perspective on this educational change process. The administration invited all interested teachers to participate in a summer planning session to develop and mold their vision of SLCs at OHS would look like and sound like. The teachers were very involved in the development of the SLCs thus the plan was very clear to them through this entire process.

Any type of change does create angst and stress especially in a setting that is already stressful. There was little resistance with the concept of SLCs due to the teachers being involved in every step of the development process. If and when there was resistance it was met with solutions not stop gaps. I feel the main reason the SLCs at OHS were successful was due to the complete buy in of all the teachers. This buy in was due to the teachers being involved and making decisions in the process. One of the biggest lessons learned from this process was the importance of incorporating and including the teachers in the development process.

Implications for Implementation of SLCs

This study offers valuable insights into one aspect of implementation – the nature of the process, dialogue and decisions that emerge in conversations in SLC meetings. The data collected from SLC meeting minutes over a six-year period provide examples of three major themes: teacher collegiality, teacher student relationships, and instructional practices.

As an experienced educator and administrator who has seen and lived through various educational reform efforts, one factor that I have observed that remains constant is the need to
educate and to develop buy-in from the faculty and staff of the school. Without buy-in from the faculty and staff, educational reform efforts are less likely to be successful. Educating the faculty and staff on the specific change to be implemented often happens at the whole school level. An advantage of the SLCs, as demonstrated in the meeting minutes, is the opportunity for group- or grade-level training and education, specifically tailored to the needs of each SLC and often delivered through peer training.

Having the faculty and staff involved in the decision making process builds ownership and buy-in. Adoption of educational reform is a difficult task, and tough choices must be made in order for successful implementation to happen at the school level. Perhaps the greatest challenge for the principal is determining how to develop a guiding vision and create a school culture that supports the new paradigm of change. Leadership “is a complex balance of conflicting forces and tension” (Ackerman & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2002, p.xii). This was, I believe, particularly evident in the district’s concurrent implementation of the seven period day and early release Wednesdays.

While it was clear to the District that changes were needed to accommodate opportunities for students to benefit from additional instructional time, the teachers did not see the initiatives as providing additional instructional time, but rather as taking away existing instructional time. An advantage of the SLCs was the strengthening of relationships among teachers and students. As evidenced in the SLC meeting minutes, the increased collegiality among teachers supported their conversations around these important interruptions to their routines and enabled their working through the implementations of these new initiatives, despite their initial resistance.

The literature characterizes successful practices when the school leader (principal) acknowledges and respects the school culture and climate. Sarason linked the external pressures
of society to the powerful norms internal to the school’s teaching in his book, *The Culture of the School and the Problems of Change* (1971). Schools are cultures, and changing a culture is far more complicated than simplistically assuming introducing new curricula or new pedagogical techniques will result in school-wide adoption (Sarason, 1971). The climate of the school is vital in the success of an educational change strategy. Goodlad (1984) found that teachers who were “more satisfied” with their jobs, worked in an environment where teachers perceived they had greater influence over their use of time, and more control of their jobs. Being observant and mindful of the school’s climate and culture are key factors in the educational change process.

The minutes of the SLC meetings captured the teachers’ desires and goals. They described the hidden culture of the school. They encapsulated the students, parents, teachers, and administrators’ vision of what an ideal learning environment would look like, sound like, and act like. OHS SLC meeting minutes were the voices of the teachers in attendance at the meetings. The meeting minutes capture the conversations that focused teachers’ building relationships with the students and their colleagues. The SLC meetings provided a professional learning group where teachers shared ideas and gained insight from their colleagues. The sharing with colleagues provided guidance they needed to stay focused on the mission and vision of the school.

When the climate and culture are observed, this enables school leaders and teachers to carry out the school mission by cultivating and maintaining a shared vision. When I observed the SLC meetings, I was able to gain insight into the teachers’ perceptions of the climate and culture. Their observations provided me the opportunity to have an open dialogue with teachers and provide support in various academic areas. Alleviating barriers to collaboration and making decisions democratically can enrich teachers’ daily quests for solutions to accommodate reform
initiatives. The barriers that are alleviated might seem simple or small to someone who is not dealing with or trying to solve multiple problems while teaching students daily. As the principal I was able to reduce and remove items off the teachers’ plates in order to provide them more time for planning and teaching.

Are there any disadvantages to SLCs? Literature does support the need to have buy in from all stakeholders to achieve a successful educational reform. If buy in is absent and other unpredictable or unforeseeable actions take place, an educational reform such as SLCs would not flourish or meet the educational needs of the students. The factors that have caused educational reforms such as SLCs to fail or not meet the needs of the stakeholders are an area for further research.

Suggestions for Further Research

A study’s methodological stance can influence what one asks questions about and looks for, and what one does not ask or look for. This study was situated in case study and document analysis research perspectives. Case study is useful for trying to learn how people “function in their ordinary pursuits” (Stake, 1995, p. 1). We try to understand what, how and why people do what they do and when it is important to look at relevant contextual conditions (Yin, 2003). This case study, in particular, looked to describe an intervention (SLCs) in a real-life context undergoing change.

Common criticisms of case study are that findings may not be relevant or particularly useful to the wider population and that it is difficult to determine definite cause-effect from a case study (Yin, 1984). What implications may these perspectives have for further research?
• How might the findings of the study be strengthened or challenged by including a survey of, or interviews with, participants to confirm findings?

• How might conducting comparative case studies with other high schools in the district that had also implemented SLCs affect findings?

• How might student and family socioeconomic status affect the implementation of SLCS in high schools?

This study further used a case study approach focusing on one depository of documents, the meeting minutes of the SLCs. While documents are more commonly used as a supplemental data source in case study, “qualitative researchers are turning to documents as their primary source of data” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p.57). Documents are a “record of human activity” created as people engage in “ongoing day-to-day activities” and can be a valuable data source in case study (Olson, 2010, p. 318). What implications may these perspectives have for further research?

• Are there other types of documents that might be analyzed to confirm the findings of the study, e.g., school board minutes, newspaper stories, school newsletters, school advisory council minutes, parent/community correspondence with the principal?

• Schools and districts are often repositories of documents. How might document analysis as a methodology for inquiry into reform initiatives be further explored? How might document analysis be a useful and meaningful tool for both researchers and participants in understanding a reform initiative and its impacts?

• How might other principal researchers’ background knowledge affect their perception of the document analysis?
Document analysis involves skimming, reading and interpretation. Skimming is an initial review of the document to identify relevant passages of text, separating pertinent information from non-pertinent information (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This initial review is followed by a more focused re-reading and closer review of passages selected to uncover themes or patterns or to identify passages that reflect characteristics of predefined categories or codes (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The researcher then attempts to understand the meaning of the themes and patterns across the passages selected. What implications may these perspectives have for further research?

- How might conducting interviews with participants about themes and subthemes identified in the document analysis enhance interpretation of the meeting minutes’ text?
- How would comparison of interpretations across participants confirm or change the overall interpretation of the findings?

I was a participant observer in this six-year educational change process at OHS. Marshall and Rossman (1999) stated, “Immersion in the setting allows the researcher to hear, see, and begin to experience reality as the participants do…This method for gathering data is basic to all qualitative studies” (p. 106). My immersion in the change process allowed me to experience the SLC meetings first hand. The teachers coordinated and ran the meetings; I participated and shared the administrator perspective. While I was engaged in the meetings, I observed teachers working together to create the best learning environment for their students. They would share best practices, offer professional development, and support to their colleagues. I gained valuable insight from attending the SLC meetings. They afforded me the opportunity to interact with the teachers outside their classroom and observe them interact and support each other. These
insights helped bring the meeting minutes to life and gave me a better perspective on the actual teacher interactions during the meetings. What implications may these perspectives have for further research?

- Did other administrators who may have participated in the SLC meetings experience the meetings or interpret them in the same ways I did?
- How would interviews with other administrators about the findings of the study enhance or change the interpretation of the findings?
- How might other administrators’ previous background knowledge of SLCs affect their perception of the SLC meetings?

**Lessons Learned as a Principal**

As the principal of OHS, I have learned that SLCs undergo a metamorphosis and take on a different look at each school. If implemented correctly, they become a subset of the school to support student and teacher success. Over the study time period I learned that clear and open communication is vital to building the culture within the school to develop and build SLCs. I believe the biggest success with implementation came from developing a core group of teachers who were interested in the idea of educational change and wanted to learn more. This core group of teachers ventured down an educational learning journey that allowed them to build and shape the SLCs as they felt was needed to meet the needs of the students and teachers. Establishing a core group of teachers is beneficial in many ways. This core group assists in educating the rest of the staff on SLCs and guiding them through the development process. The core group can also serve as the leaders of the various SLCs. I feel very strongly that this core group of teachers was the reason for the successful implementation.
My experiences with living the study and writing about it had a deep impact on my leadership. Researching and living with SLCs has made me more cognizant of leading by example and always listening to all stakeholders. People’s past or lack of experiences drive their perceptions, and this is vital in the success of any change process. I always try to look at the bigger picture when making decisions that affect the school and highest student achievement. This overarching global view provides me the opportunity to put structures in place to assist and support all stakeholders.

This study also provided me the opportunity to examine my own personal leadership. I feel that I was able to validate my perceptions in some areas and also take a deeper look in other areas. The deeper looks allowed me to think about how I traditionally respond to situations and pause to see if there is or was a better way to address the situation to achieve academic success for all of the stakeholders.

**Key leadership insights.** This study has provided me the opportunity to look at my leadership and how it affects all stakeholders. Involving all stakeholders in the decision making process throughout the stages of the SLC implementation was critical in its success. I have transferred this process to my way of work. I seek teachers to be involved in developing processes or ways of work on the campus. I have an open door policy that provides the teachers the ability to see me to discuss concerns, share ideas, or even catch me up on their personal lives. This atmosphere creates trust and collegiality which are vital to being an effective leader.

**Appreciation for unintended consequences.** There were several unintended consequences of the SLCs. I observed students who had developed a prosperous teacher-student relationship refer their friends to the teacher to get assistance. I also observed teachers building cross curricular relationships that enhanced their teaching in the classroom because of the shared knowledge and
lesson planning. Teachers also gained valuable classroom management resources from each other during the meetings. Teachers invited other teachers in their classrooms to observe best practices and effective instruction. As the SLCs morphed into professional learning communities at OHS, teacher collegiality, student-teacher relationships, teacher relationships, and improved instructional practice became the continual focus of the teachers’ monthly meetings. The teachers would routinely meet in addition to the monthly meetings to discuss and plan their lessons. The culture at OHS is one where teachers are focused on highest student achievement; they take measures to ensure they are equipped with the best knowledge to meet the academic needs of the students.

Where Are Small Learning Communities Today?

The rise of small learning communities in schools was supported through federal funding (approximately $275 million) from 2000 to 2004 followed by an additional $650 million support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (Sparger, 2005). Interest in smaller learning communities in schools has been overshadowed by the rise of emphasis on professional learning communities for teachers (e.g., Carroll, Fulton, & Doerr, 2010) and the small school reform movement in multiple U.S. cities like New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Boston where large comprehensive high schools are replaced by new small schools (e.g., Stiefel, Schwartz, & Wiswall, 2015).

The SLCs at OHS have morphed over the years as the school has grown. The teachers at OHS continue to meet in grade level and magnet program meetings however, the nature of the meetings have turned into professional learning communities for the teachers. Since the inception of SLCs at OHS the sheer volume of standardized testing from the State and District
level has increased. Teachers utilize pacing guides to ensure they cover the appropriate standards. With this increased pressure to meet all student’s academic needs the need for the meetings to morph into professional learning communities was evident to all stakeholders. The meetings still occur monthly and are lead by teacher leaders. The teachers that attend the meetings are still for the most part grouped by what grade level they teach.

The grants that the school district received culminated many years ago. Schools that are still utilizing SLCs are funding this process on their own. The school district provides the individual schools the ability to develop or implement change strategies that are research based to assist students and academic achievement. The school district has not closed any large schools to open smaller schools. They have opened one Pre k thru 8th grade school, they experimented with homogeneous classrooms, opened a 6th grade thru 12th grade personalized learning school, and are preparing to open a technical high school. These various educational changes occurred based on the needs of the stakeholders and highest student achievement.

With the December 2015 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), student success and providing students various pathways for postsecondary education to ensure they are career and college ready was brought to the forefront. The professional learning communities (PLCs) at OHS afford the teachers the time needed to ensure they are covering the appropriate subject standards to ultimately prepare students for college and career readiness. While this reauthorization (ESSA) does not provide direct funding to support the PLCs, it does validate and support their efforts to focus on highest student achievement.
Summary

This chapter provided a brief overview of the purpose of the study, situating it within the broader arena of school reform and case study and document analysis research perspectives. It also revisited the study’s initial conceptual framework, indicating how the perspective on process, dialogue and decisions made in small learning communities (SLCs) emerged as an important factor shaping teacher collegiality, student-teacher relationships, and instructional practices to influence student achievement.

The chapter discussed the findings of the analysis of the SLC meeting minutes in relation to the literature reviewed. The chapter also provided analysis of the relationship of district communications on concurrently implemented reform initiatives and their effects on teachers’ implementation of the SLCs. The contributions of the perspectives of the researcher as participant-observer to the interpretation of the findings was also explored.

Finally, the chapter identified some implications for the implementation of SLCs and suggestions for further research.

It was hoped that this study’s focus on the process of implementing SLCs from the point of view of those experiencing the change would add to existing research that appears to focus on qualitative reports of the drivers and preventers of implementing SLC reform. This study contributes to our understanding of the role of the SLC process, the dialogue and conversations that occur as SLCs meet, and the decisions that teachers make as a result of those conversations. The study also demonstrates how much this process, conversation and decision factors matter, not only in the successful implementation of the SLCs but also in actions taken to put teachers’ decisions into practice to influence student achievement.
References


United States Congress House Committee on Education and the Workforce, & United States Congress House Committee on Education and the Workforce. (2006). *No child left behind: How innovative educators are integrating subject matters to improve student achievement: Hearing before the committee on education and the workforce, U.S. house of representatives, one hundred ninth congress, second session, May 18, 2006*.
Washington: U.S. G.P.O.


Appendices
Appendices A – Sample OHS SLC Meeting Minutes
Professional Learning Community Meeting Team Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School:</th>
<th>Team: 9th Grade House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meeting Date:</td>
<td>1/14/2008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator:</td>
<td>Dr.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present:</th>
<th>Absent:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>FCAT and Academic Success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Keep tabs on these, be aware FCAT is approaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>Reiterate the importance of FCAT type strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Kaplan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Supplement and support lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>These are good sources, incorporate in your lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>Problems logging on—see Ms. for passwords, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cindy</td>
<td>Data Sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Will be coming soon to help document lessons, strategies used w/L35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudia</td>
<td>K. asked if this is above what we do on lesson plans ie. Noting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madge</td>
<td>Benchmarks and Dr. said this is just another way to document what we do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David</td>
<td>How would someone outside your classroom know that the strategies and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Support mechanisms out in place will help the student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deborah</td>
<td>Maintain current FCAT level?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Move up a level?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dr. posed the questions to see if we would be prepared to answer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Predictions
How many students do you think will move out of the L35 category?
How many students do you think will pass or not pass based on Classroom performance?
Dr. posed these questions so lesson plans will include strategies
To support these questions and answers.
9th grade kudos
   Let Dr. know of students’ community involvement, athletic and academic
   Achievements.
ESE
   C. asked team members to continue giving good input for IRP’s
   And updates.
Open Agenda
   K. asked how to motivate non-interested students.
   C. commented on student’s w/chronic absences and that this goes
   On year after year. Discussion included Oak Park School—mainly for
   Student’s w/discipline issues, Bayside HS is for academic issues. GOALS will
   be expanded on our campus. L. suggested teachers submit names of
   students to Child Study.
   C. asked that we discuss this year’s evaluation process at the next meeting.
   Dr. suggested teachers make an appointment w/the administrator who will be
   conducting this year’s evaluation to discuss dates and the process.

This minute form should be posted in the appropriate MS Outlook public folder within 48 hours of the meeting. Principal will be expected to review and keep all PLC Meeting Feedback forms so they can be shared with the area superintendent.
Appendices B – Sample OHS SLC Meeting Minutes – Color Coded

Monday, February 18, 2013 12:03:00 PM Eastern Standard Time

Subject: minutes of 3/19/12
Date: Monday, March 19, 2012 3:10:11 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From: Lachance Robin

Absent: John Baker (track), Dean Schafer (track), Dan Perazzo, Jennifer Seaman, Warren Jones (went home sick), Mary Galante

All others were present.

Spoke about numerous students and what problems they may have in classrooms. Most of the students it seems to be attendance problems or just not caring enough.

K.D.: student is not responding in class. Has an attitude problem, likes to socialize in some of her classrooms also not reading very well in Ms. McCollum
Suggestion: Was a conference with the teachers & parents

B.B.: This student is and 11th grade student. Will not do work and very immature.
Suggestion: Write referrals

C.A.: Student does not come to school.
Suggestion: Ms. Kelly, attendance specialist is aware of this student and is working on a plan with his mom.

S.R.: Not organized, can't read his handwriting. This student is a smart student but forgets very easily.
Suggestion: Teachers have him type his work so they can understand it. Also maybe a candidate for AVID.
Mrs. McCollum will talk to Mrs. Prince. Maybe a mentor would help to get him organized.

C.H. Seems to not be doing as well this semester, maybe some home issues.
Suggestion: To have her speak to Ms. Montgomery

S.S.: Student is absent a lot, has a terrible attitude about school and the lowest GPA ever. Mr. Papp spoke to her about this issue and how she has to get back on track she will not graduate. Always seems to be getting herself in some kind of trouble.
Suggestion: Look at some kind of alternative school.

Question was asked to Mr. Papp about teacher/parent conferences. He told the teachers Tues or Thurs maybe good right now but, please check with him first.

Ms. LaChance gave out some bars and letters invitations and asked that the teachers please give these to the students.

Robin LaChance
Appendices B – Sample OHS SLC Meeting Minutes – Color Coded

Monday, February 18, 2013 12:03:27 PM Eastern Standard Time

Subject: minutes 1/28
Date: Tuesday, November 29, 2011 8:44:06 AM Eastern Standard Time
From: Lachance Robin

The following teachers were absent: Leni Fernandez (conference), Brad Sakevich, Deborah Stiegilitz.

Ms. Ford made sure everyone felt like they were in the correct grade house, 10th. All felt as if they were.

Contact with Parent:

When making contact with a parent please make sure that you document each time that you do. The best way you can do this is in portal. There is a section for Parent Contact and you can type in just what you discussed with the parent and the date and time and you will have it documented.

Is there anything on the agenda that you feel we need to discuss that may not be on there? All said no.

C.B., A.B. and B.B. three students were brought up for being late all the time but, have excuses and also Ms. LaChance spoke to Ms. Barker about speaking to mom about their lateness and failing grades.

Seems like we have some students who we talk to the parents and the students starts doing well and then after a couple of weeks they are back to being their own self again.

Teacher called to have a conference with one of our parents and the parent said NO child will do better.

D.W. student has functional behavior problems. Likes only some administrators and teachers and said that he gave up for this semester will do better next.

S.N. Has trouble reading needs academic plan. It was suggested that you let Anne Pesacov and Maureen Montgomery know about this student so he may be tested.

It was asked what to do if you have some students who you feel do not belong in honors classes how do you deal with it? Some teachers feel like they are falling behind with other students because they hold them back to help the students who are having trouble who should probably not be in those classes. There was no suggestion.

It was asked by the teachers if we can get a new list of GPA, Non ESE at Risk students to see if we can compare if their GPA has changed any.

Teachers have been making attempts to contact parents not always with good luck.

Robin LaChance
10th Grade Office
Palm Harbor University H.S.

Page 1 of 1
Appendices B– Sample OHS SLC Meeting Minutes – Color Coded

Monday, February 18, 2013 12:01:28 PM Eastern Standard Time

Subject: 12/10/07 House Meeting PLC
Date: Thursday, December 13, 2007 3:16:32 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: Dent-Palmer Radiah

Professional Learning Community Meeting Team Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>gth Grade House</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Palm Harbor University</td>
<td>Meeting Facilitator:</td>
<td>Dr. Dent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Attendees</th>
<th>Absent:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12/10/2007</td>
<td>John Adkins, Laura Baker, Rebecca Cole, Chad Guercia, Karen Hogan, Lisa Holewinski, Julie Kemble, Paula Mazarakis, Claudia Peebles, Madge Pipito, David Rowland, Rebecca Spiegel</td>
<td>Mike Walters, Deborah Steigiltz, Mark Haye, Kerri Silvernoll, John Baker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Struggling Students/Student Work Discussed:
   - Preparing for FCAT: Top 10 List
     - Integrate higher order thinking into all classes
     - Make sure students are familiar with item formats
     - Keep the main thing the main thing
     - Strive to use higher level Bloom's Taxonomy activities and levels of Questioning

2. Instructional Strategies/Interventions Planned for Next Week:
   - Principal's Affinity Charts for Eliminating Gaps in Achievement
     - Discussion of ways to develop positive relationships with students and relevance to real world situations
   - Sites and sources for research based Best Practices discussed

3. Success Experienced (as a result of strategies tried based on the discussion from the last PLC meeting)
   - Best Practices for informing students of the agenda and objectives for lessons:
     - Write this on the board
     - Calendars
     - Tell the students verbally
     - Use graphic organizers
     - Running Table of Contents posted
     - Web sites
     - e-mails “Head Up”
## Appendices C: Excerpts from OHS SLC Meeting Minutes – Teacher Collegiality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Excerpts from OHS SLC Meeting Minutes – Teacher Collegiality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2007 | • Shared lesson plan format for all teachers at OHS  
       • ESE teachers trained their grade level houses on a different disability every month. The disabilities that were presented were representative of the ESE students at OHS. They shared with the SLC how they can assist students who have this specific disability.  
       • Teachers work together to support a safe learning environment  
       • Individual Professional Development Plans  
       • Best practices  
       • Teacher asked her SLC "how do they motivate non-interested students?"  
       • Teachers supported each other with evaluation process  
       • Teachers in SLC's work together to develop classroom processes  
       • Creation of homeroom committee to discuss the process of designing and implementing a homeroom the following school year  
       • Continued discussion of the recent transition into SLC's  
       • Core teachers will meet with the middle school teachers to share expectations for rising 9th grade students  
     |
| 2008 | • Developed a list of professional development opportunities that can be delivered by their colleagues  
       • Discussions of students and potential drug use  
       • AVID program was discussed  
       • Students with high number of referrals were discussed and strategies to implement  
       • Essential learning’s discussed and how they support highest student achievement  
       • Parent conferences  
       • Discussions about L35 students and strategies  
       • Discussed the possibility of implementing a study hall and the pluses and negative or implementing a study hall  
       • Discussion on teacher goals, what they are planning, hope to accomplish this school year  
     |
| 2009 | • SLC's discussed what they are doing to support L35 student and how are they challenging the higher achieving students  
       • Relationships affect the achievement gap  
       • Richard DuFour's 3 Questions for student success - What do we want the student to learn, How do we know that they have learned it, and What are we going to do to help the students who have not learned it yet?  
       • Discussions of school climate, pluses and deltas  
       • The SLC's afford communication between the teachers  
     |
- SLC’s provide unity and purpose
- "We are able to connect and discuss similar students"
- Class unity- discussion about a end of year activity
- Develop and implement a way of aligning curricula from two or more areas for units - Some teachers are currently doing this and will share with the SLC
- SLC’s discussed how someone from outside their classroom could identify the strategies and support systems they have implemented to assist students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2010 | SLC’s discussed needs for their house meetings for the up coming school year  
SLC's discussed the new freshman experience class and how it can be a resource for the students  
RTI process and how it will assist the students  
Discussed how to identify at risk students  
Study Skills class for 9th grade  
Teachers shared the strategies they are implementing to support FCAT in various subjects  
Discussed a possible different schedule for the next school year  
Discussed specific grade level behaviors over the past 6 weeks  
Discussed implementing a mentor process and having teachers volunteer to mentor  
SLC’s discussed what they want to focus on for the new school year |
| 2011 | Discussions about teaming across grade levels and within subject areas "it was discussed that teaming within subject areas during house meetings is a good use of time. Opportunity to for sharing teaching strategies  
Building grade level team unity  
Teachers offered support with behavior issues  
"You may have success with a student in your class but he/she is not doing well in another class, so we are that you share what you may be doing that could help the student all their classes".  
Discussed communications with parents and how to document in student information system  
Discussions on student placement in honors classes  
Discussed struggling students with academics and attendance |
| 2012 | Developing reading plans for specific subjects that address various literacy strategies  
Teachers discussed the need to have more specific conversations with their colleagues about general 9th grade information and students  
Discussed the various resources that are available to assist students who struggle in reading and math  
Discussed students on probation and how can the SLC support them  
Discussed various professional development opportunities to support the SLC |
## Appendices D: Excerpts from OHS SLC Meeting Minutes – Teacher/Student Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Excerpts from OHS SLC Meeting Minutes – Teacher/Student Relationship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2007 | • Discussed establishing a mentoring program, pairing teachers with at risk students  
      • Teachers shared interventions that they have been implementing to build a relationship with their students and at risk students  
      • "Discussions on ways to develop positive relationships with students and share with them real world situations".  
      • Monitoring the progress of L35 students in your classes and keeping tabs on these students as FCAT approaches  
      • Freshman socials - "We need to have freshman socials two times a year"  
      • Developing a homeroom period where the teacher can serve as the advisor and guide the students  
      • "Phreshmen Phootball Phrenzy" established to help the freshman transition into high school and a opportunity to interact with the 9th grade teachers in a non-classroom setting |
| 2008 | • Teachers are staying in contact with students and parents about grades and possible failures  
      • Identify ways to recognize student success  
      • AVID program - teacher recommendations for program  
      • Peer Connectors  
      • PBS/RTI - teachers documenting interactions with students  
      • SLC’s discussed how building relationships with the students will assist in learning and closing the achievement gap.  
      • Contacting parents and bringing them in the loop to assist with learning process  
      • At SLC meeting teachers shared the steps they have implemented to assist at risk students. The steps they have put in place range from check and connect, personal conversations with students. Building a rapport with the student and build trust. |
| 2009 | • Recognizing students for academic success with bars and academic letters  
      • Teachers working with students developing goals for the future  
      • Notes to parents to share positive and not always negative  
      • The development of a homeroom would promote team building and class bonding.  
      • SLC shared how they develop relationships with their students  
      • Teachers discussed concerns for students in AP classes that are struggling. They discussed the measures they have taken to support the students and communications with parents |
| 2010 | • 12th grade house, SLC, discussed their pyramid of interventions that they use to support their student’s success.  
      • Discussed developing a wall of fame for the seniors  
      • Teachers discussed making frequent calls to parents to discuss student progress or concerns in class. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Discussions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 2011 | - Discussed strategies to be implemented before their senior year to ensure graduation  
      - Senior celebration planning  
      - Freshman pinning ceremony  
      - Parent booster meetings  
      - Advisory board meeting - quarterly  
      - SLC discussed how relationships affect the achievement gap - teachers discussed best practices in developing relationships with students  
| 2012 | - Discussed developing a wall of fame for the seniors  
      - Teachers discussed making frequent calls to parents to discuss student progress or concerns in class.  
      - Discussed strategies to be implemented before their senior year to ensure graduation  
      - Senior celebration planning  
      - Freshman pinning ceremony  
      - Parent booster meetings  
      - Advisory board meeting - quarterly  
      - SLC discussed how relationships affect the achievement gap - teachers discussed best practices in developing relationships with students  
      - SLC discussed mentoring of student within their SLC  
      - Medical SLC conducts a freshman field trip each year. This trip helps build community around the magnet, better relationships with peers and teachers.  
      - Medical SLC implemented scrub day to help build unity amongst the medical students  
      - IB SLC agreed to meet an additional day each month to "keep up with student progress and keep our identity"  
      - Discussed implementing an advisory period that would allow teachers to meet with students in a smaller setting and build relationships with them and assist in their ability to graduate.  
      - Informal conversations with struggling students - teachers discussed and coached other teachers in their SLC how to start this conversation with the students  
      - 12th grade house discussed ideas to assist the students feel special about their senior year. Possible painting of senior parking spots was the proposed idea |
### Appendices E: Excerpts from OHS SLC Meeting Minutes – Instructional Practices

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Excerpts from OHS SLC Meeting Minutes – Instructional Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>• Lesson plans submitted to department chairs each 6 weeks</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Progress reports</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Administrative walk-thrus to ensure curriculum delivery meeting the needs of the student</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• J Report was distributed and discussed indicating students most recent FCAT and SRI Lexile scores - this information was used to support student success in the classroom</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Richard DuFour's 3 questions for student growth</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discussed specific strategies to address the L25 students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Preparing for FCAT - Higher order thinking into all classes, familiarity with test item format, focus on main idea, strive to use higher level of Bloom's taxonomy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discussed academic settings for students with chronic absenteeism</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>• Discussed summer program to assist 9th grade students acclimate to HS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discussed various schedule types for next school year - discussed the pluses and deltas of the various schedules to determine which one supports highest student performance</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• RTI - Interventions for tier 1 and 2 students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discussed how to improve high school and student’s academic success</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Discussed being proactive to address at risk students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SLC's discussed developing reading plans to address literacy strategies and needs of students in various curriculums</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SLC's discussed how they are addressing L35 students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create list of at risk students and classify students into specific categories - Academic, social, or both</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>• Discussion about issues specific to students regarding their academic attitudes and how it relates to their home issues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Discussed the implementation of a 9th grade study skills class</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• SLC discussed what they are implementing to assist students with FCAT - practice books, vocabulary building, context clues in reading, building endurance, identification of main idea and details in a story or abstract</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mentoring students with behavior issues which will hopefully improve academics</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SLC collaborated and shared strategies to assist struggling students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• AVID program and teacher recommendations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Focus learning around the Essential Learning Questions for the lesson or unit</td>
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<td>2010</td>
<td>• Parent Conferences</td>
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<td>• Cross curricular teaming to support the academic needs of the students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Continual discussions in SLC's about specific students with academic or behavioral concerns. Teachers discussing and trying to develop alternatives to assist the students</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Communication with parents to help assist with academic needs</td>
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<td>• Encouraging words to struggling students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 2011 | - Reading plans to encourage reading across curriculums  
      - SLC’s discussed how to build unity and purpose for the students  
      - Being proactive with 11th grade students to ensure they will graduate their senior year  
      - SLC’s discussed supporting student’s academic needs in AP classes  
      - Discussed FLDOE’s new graduation requirements  
      - SLC’s discussed how they can support the 11th and 12th grade students who have not passed the FCAT yet  
      - Discussion about implementing an advisory period to support student academic success  
      - Discussed having informal conversations with at risk students that focuses on non school related topics, will help build rapport with students  
      - Discussed implementing an academic success plan with struggling students  |
| 2012 | - 12th grade house discussed establishing voluntary mentor teachers  
      - Medical SLC conducted grade level discussions to meet the academic needs of the students  
      - SLC discussed how they as the teacher will have the students interact with new knowledge and support the lesson. How will they know when the students understand the new content?  
      - SLC discussed supporting learning over the summer with summer reading assignments  
      - SLC discussed their use of academic coaching to help students develop an academic assistance plan  
      - Teamed with other local high school IB program to ensure curriculum rigor and best practices |
Appendices F – IRB Approval Letter and Extension

January 29, 2012

Christen Toney
Institutional Leadership
230 Countryside Key Blvd.
Clearwater, FL 33767

RE: Expedited Approval for Initial Review
IRB #: Prot0005778
Title: A Case Study on Teacher perceptions of the implementation of small learning communities at a Florida high school.

Dear Ms. Toney:

On 1/20/2012 the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above referenced protocol. Please note that your approval for this study will expire on 1/20/2013.

Approved Items:

Protocol Document(s):
IRB Research Plan 12-4-11.docx

Consent/Assent Document(s):
Focus Group Minimal Consent Form Revised 3.docx.pdf
Questionnaire: Minimal Risk Consent Form Revised 3.docx.pdf

It was the determination of the IRB that your study qualified for expedited review which includes activities that (1) pose no more than minimal risk to human subjects and (2) involve only procedures listed in one or more of the categories outlined below. The IRB may review research through the expedited review procedure authorized by 45 CFR Part 46 and 21 CFR Part 56.1110. The research proposed in this study is categorized under the following expedited review categories:

(1) Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

(7) Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, and history

focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.
Please note, the informed consent/consent documents are valid during the period indicated by the official, IRB-Approved stamp located on the form. Valid consent must be documented on a copy of the most recently IRB-approved consent form.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with IRB policies and procedures and as approved by the IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment.

We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

John A. Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board
1/3/2016

Christian Tockey
L-CACHE - Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career & Higher Education
4301 E. Fowler Avenue
Tampa, FL 33620

RF: Expedited Approval for Continuing Review
IRB#: CR4 Pro00005779
Title: A Case Study on Teacher Perceptions of the Implementation of Small Learning Communities at a Florida High School.

Study Approval Period: 1/22/2016 to 1/23/2017

Dear Ms. Tockey:

On 1/7/2016, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) reviewed and APPROVED the above application and all documents contained within including those outlined below.

Approved Items:
Protocol Document(s):
IRB Research Plan [12-11-11 draft]

The IRB determined that your study qualified for expedited review based on federal expedited category number(s):

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) on research employing survey, interview, and history.

As the principal investigator of this study, it is your responsibility to conduct this study in accordance with USF HRPP policies and procedures and as approved by the USF IRB. Any changes to the approved research must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval by an amendment. Additionally, all unanticipated problems must be reported to the USF IRB within five (5) calendar days.
We appreciate your dedication to the ethical conduct of human subject research at the University of South Florida and your continued commitment to human research protections. If you have any questions regarding this matter, please call 813-974-5638.

Sincerely,

[Signature]
John Schinka, Ph.D., Chairperson
USF Institutional Review Board