


2014

The Evaluation of Impact the South Carolina System for Teacher and Student Advancement Professional Development Model has on Teacher Dispositions

Andrew Hooker
Gardner-Webb University

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The Evaluation of Impact the South Carolina System for Teacher and Student
Advancement Professional Development Model has on Teacher Dispositions

By
Andrew Hooker

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2014

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Andrew Hooker under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

Doug Eury, Ed.D.
Committee Chair

Date

Jennifer Putnam, Ed.D.
Committee Member

Date

Jason Parker, Ed.D.
Committee Member

Date

Jeffrey Rogers, Ph.D.
Dean of the Gayle Bolt Price School
of Graduate Studies

Date

Abstract

The Evaluation of Impact the South Carolina System for Teacher and Student Advancement Professional Development Model has on Teacher Dispositions. Hooker, Andrew, 2014: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, SCTAP/Professional Development/Teacher Dispositions/Middle School Teachers/Teacher Attitudes

Education is continually looking for ways to increase student achievement. This is appropriate because the goal of education is to increase student achievement. Student achievement has continued to be unpredictable throughout the country due to the many factors which present themselves throughout the educational process.

The purpose of this dissertation was to look at a specific professional development model, South Carolina System for Teacher and Student Advancement (SCTAP), to measure the impact this model had on teacher dispositions. The following research question guided this study: To what extent does the SCTAP professional development model impact teacher disposition within the following: Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose?

The researcher used a survey, a focus group, and interviews with the faculty to answer the research question. Participants for this study included school administrators and teachers. These data were analyzed individually for trends. These data methods were also triangulated for trends. The data were shared in frequency tables which included both cumulative and percentages of each disposition. Each of the dispositions described by Usher, Usher, and Usher (2003) was addressed, and evidence from the study was provided as to what impact each of these dispositions had on the teachers in the study. An explanation of how these beliefs could impact teacher dispositions was given along with the impact of how teacher dispositions could influence student achievement. Additionally, the impact of future research on teacher dispositions was provided.

An analysis of the data showed the area of the SCTAP professional development model which most impacted these attributes of a teacher's disposition was cluster. Meaningful purpose was the attribute of a teacher's disposition which was most impacted by each of the three areas of the SCTAP professional development model.

Table of Contents

	Page
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	9
Purpose of the Study.....	10
Research Question.....	10
Definition of Terms.....	11
Organization of Study.....	12
Chapter 2: Review of the Related Literature.....	14
Overview.....	14
Evidence of Existing Trends Related to Cluster.....	16
Evidence of Existing Trends Related to Incentive Pay.....	24
Teacher Effectiveness.....	31
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	41
Overview.....	41
Participants.....	42
Instruments.....	43
Procedures.....	45
Limitations.....	46
Chapter 4: Data Analysis.....	47
Introduction.....	47
Findings.....	48
Findings of Surveys Connected to Disposition.....	51
Findings of Focus Group Connected to Disposition.....	55
Cluster.....	56
Incentive-Based Pay.....	60
Evaluation.....	62
Summary of Focus Group Data.....	64
Findings of Interviews Connected to Disposition Attributes.....	65
Interview-Participant One (Shameka).....	65
Interview-Participant Two (Hannah).....	68
Summary of Interview Findings.....	73
Chapter 5: Discussion.....	74
Introduction.....	74
Research Question.....	75
Problem.....	75
Purpose Statement.....	76
Review of Methodology.....	77
Major Findings.....	77
Findings Related to Literature.....	78
Limitations.....	79
Delimitations.....	80
Future Research/Surprises.....	80
References.....	82

Appendices

A	Survey Protocol	88
B	Letter of Approval for Survey Questions.....	97
C	Focus Group Protocol	98
D	Interview Protocol	100

Tables

1	Cluster with Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose	50
2	Incentive-Based Pay with Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose.....	51
3	Evaluation with Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose	51
4	Empathy and the Components of the SCTAP Model	52
5	Positive View of Others and the Components of the SCTAP Model.....	53
6	Positive View of Self and the Components of the SCTAP Model.....	53
7	Authenticity and the Components of the SCTAP Model.....	54
8	Empathy and the Components of the SCTAP Model.....	55
9	Attribute Frequency	65

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

For years American education has been a source of pride. Our egalitarian school system has offered opportunities to millions of children, at least in theory, regardless of race or background. This access to education has been a major contributor to this country's success and pride. The rest of the world has made progress, too; however, an America can no longer claim to have the world's best educated populace. In this global economy, our students often do not fare as well as many other countries in the industrialized world. This decline in status has fueled an almost frenetic quest for accountability and for solutions to the problem. The severity of the problems facing this country's schools was made apparent with the publication of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (1983) report on the necessity of education reform. In *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, the commission stated, "In a world of ever-accelerating competition and change in the conditions of the workplace, of ever-greater danger, and of ever-larger opportunities for those prepared to meet them, educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 14). Unable to ignore or explain away the findings, educators and legislators looked for ways to reform the system and improve the educational opportunities available to all children. One of the most sweeping efforts was the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), the George W. Bush administration's ambitious blueprint for meeting the needs of all students. Passed into law in 2001, NCLB was unprecedented in its scope, focusing on bringing every child up to standard and holding schools accountable if they were unable to attain their goals. Few could argue against the need for reform. Researchers Huffman and Hipp (2003) asserted, "Change

will require a radical reculturing of the school as an institution, and the basic redesign of the teaching profession” (p. 15). Like all efforts at meaningful reform, NCLB was always a source of controversy, and despite the vast influx of money, the intensive training for teachers, and the rigorous assessment programs, the nation’s children are still at risk, and educators are still searching for the best ways to meet students’ needs. Research shows that one of the most effective ways to bring about positive change is to ensure that classroom teachers are well-suited to their jobs and are completely invested in their students.

NCLB brought more attention to accountability by focusing on four areas: increased accountability for districts and schools, greater control of federal funds given to states and districts, increased funding for scientifically proven programs, and more parental choice in where their children attend school if the school for which they are zoned is failing. The goal of NCLB was to close the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children. Part of that goal included 100% proficiency for third-grade students. To increase the likelihood of reaching this goal, all students would be taught by a *highly qualified* educator. Because reform is costly, NCLB allows states to receive 40% more federal education funding. To receive funding, states must adhere to specific requirements.

In the matter of testing and assessment, states would test students annually in Grades 3-8 in reading and mathematics. Testing in science would be less frequent, occurring a total of only three times, once in high school. To ensure the tests’ validity, each state’s assessment system would be verified by evaluating selected districts in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) test. A complete analysis and reporting of student achievement would contribute to determining if a school, district, and

state are making adequate yearly progress toward the goal of 100% proficiency by 2013-2014. States not meeting standards could receive sanctions if improvement does not take place following federally provided technical assistance.

The most crucial component of educational success is the quality of classroom instruction. To that end, core academic teachers will be required to have attained highly qualified status. Aides must also be highly qualified or be trained paraprofessionals. Finally, support must be provided for students not meeting standards or those with special needs. All strategies used to instruct students and provide additional support must be scientifically based.

NCLB was up for authorization in 2007; in 2008, the Obama administration proposed 19 changes to the legislation, including differentiated accountability, clarification on measuring student achievement, and a general restructuring of the accountability system (Carlton College, 2008).

On March 13, 2010, the Department of Education released the Obama administration's blueprint for reauthorizing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as NCLB was now called, stating,

The blueprint challenges the nation to embrace education standards that would put America on a path to global leadership. It provides incentives for states to adopt academic standards that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace, and create accountability systems that measure student growth toward meeting the goal that all children graduate and succeed in college. (African American Voices in Congress, n.d., p. 2)

The blueprint, which is still being challenged and discussed in the United States Senate, puts a strong focus on both students and teachers. Overall, the objective of the program

is to produce high school graduates who are prepared for college or for a career, whichever path they choose. This goal would be achieved by implementing higher standards for students at all levels, improving assessments to analyze academic achievements, and developing a broad and varied curriculum. Students' educational opportunities improve when they have equal access to accomplished and dedicated teachers.

Another requisite for student achievement is to provide opportunities for success through *rigorous and fair accountability*. Schools are further incentivized through the Obama administration's "Race to the Top Challenge," which has motivated schools to develop more innovative efforts to raise standards and reward excellence. Other federal programs such as the Investing in Innovation Fund provide additional avenues through which progress can be made. Programs promoting real reform must be sure to put support programs in place to meet the needs of even the most disadvantaged students.

This revised and improved legislation maintains a focus on teacher, student, and parent accountability; school performance ratings; standardized testing results; teacher quality; strong academic standards; and equity for students in poverty. A renewed focus on merit pay for teachers has emerged as well. The premise of this incentive-based pay concept is that teachers whose students have better scores should be rewarded accordingly. Both Republican and Democratic politicians led initiatives that target each state's specific populations more effectively (Burke, 2010). At least for now, the progress of this reauthorization is stalled. The House of Representatives has held a conference on education and the regulatory environment, and the Senate has held a meeting to create a "Statement of Principles to Fix the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)" (DeSchryver, 2011, p. 1). Unfortunately, simply holding these

meetings has not significantly moved the legislation forward. President Obama has challenged Congress to reauthorize ESEA by September 2012. Since February 2012, however, Representative John Kline, Chair of the House Education, has scheduled five meetings with minimal participation. In the last week of March, the tri-caucus, composed of the Congressional Black Caucus, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, and the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, sent a letter to Congress urging them to make a decision on reauthorizing ESEA to help “ensure schools are held accountable for meeting the needs of student subgroups such as low-income students, students of color, and students with disabilities” (Brown & Ayers, 2011, p. 2).

On February 28, 2012, Dr. Mick Zais, Superintendent of Education for South Carolina, requested a waiver from certain components of NCLB. One of the primary aspects of the federal waiver was teacher and principal accountability assessments as developed by the South Carolina Department of Education. Zais requested a new system of accountability that would give schools and school districts a letter grade based on student achievement and graduation rates. This letter-grade approach would also require increased transparency on student achievement by subgroups. The waiver also addressed an important point of contention, the Average Yearly Progress *all-or-nothing* ratings system. To address that problem, the waiver requested the ability to recognize and give credit for progress and student growth, offering a fairer picture of each school’s gains and job performance. Finally, the state would establish an evaluation system for educators that would incorporate student growth and achievement by 2014-2015.

In accordance with the new federal guidelines, schools must prove successful with all students, including their subgroups. No matter how many theories exist about the reasons for student performance, educators uniformly agree that the classroom teacher

exerts the most influence on student achievement. Part of the teacher's classroom success or failure is tied to his or her disposition, best defined as the values, commitments, and professional ethics which guide the teacher's professional life. Dispositions influence teacher behavior toward students, colleagues, and communities. These attitudes also affect student learning, motivation, and development (Grand Canyon University, 2014). With the federal guidelines in place, district- and school-level administrators must research best practices and ways to change teacher dispositions as needed in hopes that these changes will lead to an increase in student achievement. Teacher dispositions affect student learning, student motivation, and student development. They also impact an educator's own professional growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice. For example, dispositions might include a belief that all students can learn. Further, dispositions might include a vision of high and challenging standards or an intense commitment to safe and supportive learning environments (Singh & Stoloff, 2008). Nixon, Dam, and Packard (n.d.) asserted, "While there has been considerable research on the beliefs and characteristics of teachers, recently there has been a more focused emphasis on the need for teachers to be equipped with the right dispositions for effective teaching" (p. 3). In addition, Lauer and Dean (2004) defined teacher quality as the "knowledge, skills, abilities, and dispositions of teachers" that enable them to "engage in rigorous, meaningful activities that foster academic learning for all students" (p. 1).

The role of teacher disposition as a change agent in improving student performance is steadily assuming prominence in the conversation about school cultures (Grand Canyon University, 2014). Positive dispositions indicate a passion and desire to

perform well instead of merely a need to respond to a mandate (Balls, Eury, & King, 2011, p. 79). Combs (1999) designed a series of studies to investigate what *helpers*, those who serve and assist others, believe makes the difference in their job performance. Combs identified the following five areas:

Good helpers are people oriented; they are sensitive or empathic Good helpers hold more positive beliefs about the people with whom they work Good helpers hold positive beliefs about themselves Good helpers hold beliefs about purposes that are more people oriented, broader and deeper, and concerned with freeing rather than controlling Good helpers hold beliefs that allow them to be more self-revealing than self-concealing. They are characterized by authenticity in their beliefs. (Usher, Usher, & Usher, 2003, p. 2)

Usher et al. (2003) reformulated these five beliefs into dispositions of effective teachers and used them to continue research on teacher dispositions. For the purpose of this study, the following research will focus on these five beliefs: empathy, positive view of others, positive view of self, authenticity, and meaningful purpose. Usher et al.'s definitions of these dispositions are explained and will be expounded upon in Chapter 2.

Empathy. The researchers described empathy as seeing and accepting the other person's point of view. Believes that a true grasp of the learner's point of view and an accurate communication of that understanding is a most important key to establishing a significant teaching/learning relationship. Commits to sensitivity and to establishing a relationship with each learner. Sees that the beginning point of learning is dependent upon a clear acceptance of the learner's private world of awareness at the time. Respects and accepts as real each person's own unique perceptions. (p. 3)

Positive view of others. Usher et al. (2003) explained the disposition of a

positive view of others as

Believing in the worth, ability and potential of others. Believes that trust and confidence in the learner's worth, ability and capacity for change is a key to learning. Sees other people in essentially positive ways. Honors the internal dignity and integrity of each learner and holds positive expectations for her or his behavior. Typically approaches others feeling that they "can" and "will" rather than that they "can't" or "won't." (p. 3)

Positive view of self. Usher et al. (2003) explained how an effective teacher must have a positive view of self.

Believing in the worth, ability and potential of themselves. Having an established self-concept that is fundamentally positive and provides an overall sense of self-adequacy. Sees himself/herself as essentially dependable and capable and thus is accepting of inadequacies. Sees herself/himself generally but not exclusively in positive ways—with a positive, abiding and trustworthy sense of actual and potential worth, ability and capacity for growth. Honors the internal dignity and integrity of self and holds positive expectations for his/her own actions. (p. 3)

Authenticity. Usher et al. (2003) contended that an effective teacher must possess a disposition of authenticity.

Feeling a sense of freedom and openness that enables her or him to be a unique person in honesty and genuineness. Seeks ways of teaching (procedures, methods, techniques, curricular approaches) that are honest, self-revealing and allow personal-professional congruence. Sees the importance of openness, self-disclosure and being "real" as a person and teacher. Develops a personal "idiom" as a teacher and melds personality uniqueness with curricular expectations. Does

not feel that one must “play a role” to be effective.” (p. 3)

Meaningful purpose. Usher et al. (2003) explained the disposition of meaningful purpose and vision.

Committing to purposes that are primarily person-centered, broad, deep, freeing and long range in nature. Feels a compelling and abiding sense of allegiance to democratic values, the dignity of being human, and the sacredness of freedom. Sees the importance of being visionary and reflective as a teacher. Commits to growth for all learners in mental, physical and spiritual realms through a sense of “mission” in education. Seeks to identify, clarify and intensify knowledge and personal beliefs about what is really most important. (p. 3)

Statement of the Problem

According to Barbara Schneider, “Despite more than a decade of intensive efforts at school reform, families, teachers, and policymakers continue to demand more effective strategies to improve the academic productivity of American schools” (Coleman et al., 1997, p. 1). In order to meet the demands for improvement, educators continue to implement best practices and give teachers opportunities for meaningful professional development. “In the early 1900’s Dewey implied that children respond directly to teachers’ dispositions. The importance of the teacher’s disposition, therefore, necessitates a clear understanding of which attitudes have the most positive impact on children” (Richardson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 32). Tishman, Jay, and Perkins (1992) argued that dispositions toward certain ways of thinking need not be inherent but can be developed through practice, reflection, encouragement, and direction. If professional development models can improve teacher dispositions, these improvements should have a positive impact on student learning. Further research is needed on the importance of

dispositions to effective teaching.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact, if any, the South Carolina Teacher and Student Advancement Program (SCTAP) professional development model has on middle-level teacher dispositions. SCTAP is a reform effort encompassing many other reform efforts, including teacher incentive pay, professional learning communities (PLCs), and teacher evaluation. This study was designed specifically to investigate the impact of SCTAP components, including cluster meetings, value-added incentive pay, and teacher evaluation on middle-level teacher dispositions. Dispositions can be defined as the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence teacher behavior toward students, families, colleagues, and communities, ultimately affecting student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator's own professional growth (Mitchell, 2000). To foster more effective teaching, leaders must examine teacher dispositions and determine their role in the students' overall experiences. This research is important because effective teacher dispositions, combined with teacher knowledge, may prove to be the answer in improving student achievement. As Singh and Stoloff (2008) explained, teacher dispositions play as critical a role in teacher quality and effectiveness as do pedagogical and content knowledge and skills.

Research Question

Student achievement, the primary focus of education, is also the focus of the SCTAP development program. Research has suggested that professional development does not lead to change in instruction unless the professional development is consistent and ongoing. The SCTAP model is both. SCTAP schools work toward one goal per year. This goal is created based on information gathered from several data sources.

Once the goal is created, the professional development is created around it, and the faculty works on the goal weekly. The school's progress toward meeting the goal is monitored throughout the year.

Additional research suggests that if teachers are able to change and improve their dispositions about teaching, or if teachers inherently possess positive dispositions about teaching, they are more apt to be successful. This study looks at five specific teacher dispositions as described by Usher et al. (2003). The researcher hopes that studying these five dispositions through the SCTAP model will provide evidence of a change in teacher dispositions, resulting in a corresponding increase in student achievement. Knowing the impact of this change will offer insight into which parts of the professional development model most affect changes in a teacher's disposition.

The following research question guided this study: To what extent does the SCTAP professional development model impact teacher disposition within the following: Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose?

Definition of Terms

SCTAP.

The SCTAP System was based on a model launched in 1999 as an initiative of the Milken Family Foundation. It is now operated by the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET). TAP encourages teachers to grow and allows them to prosper by offering new models for professional entry and training, with new compensation and career advancement possibilities. (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013, p. 1).

PLC. An ongoing process used to establish a school-wide culture that develops

teacher leadership explicitly focused on building and sustaining school improvement efforts. Generally, PLCs are composed of teachers, although administrators and support staff routinely participate (Huffman, 2000).

ESEA. According to a report out of the state of Washington in 2012, ESEA was passed in 1965 as a part of the *War on Poverty*. ESEA emphasizes equal access to education and establishes high standards and accountability. The law authorizes federally funded education programs that are administered by the states. In 2002, Congress amended ESEA and renamed it NCLB. Because of the negative connotations associated with NCLB, the Obama administration reworked eight of the law's requirements and reverted back to the name ESEA but has yet to complete the necessary work for reauthorization (State of Washington, 2012).

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 offers a perspective on accountability and has explained accountability and the federal and state legislative efforts to make its implementation feasible. The researcher explains the importance of accountability when looking at and analyzing significant trends in student achievement. Chapter 1 also expounds on the importance of teacher dispositions and identifies Usher et al.'s (2003) five dispositions which served as the basis for this study which evaluated the impact of the SCTAP professional development model on teacher dispositions.

In Chapter 2, the following components of SCTAP are explained: multiple career paths, performance-based compensation, and ongoing and applied professional growth. The chapter includes research related to cluster and incentive pay. The chapter concludes with a look at teacher effectiveness. Chapter 3 begins with the research design and continues with the approach and rationale of the methods used within the study. The

researcher identifies the participants in the study. The researcher explains the data collection methods and describes the data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 explains the analysis of the data. A summary of data for each of the three data collection methods is also included. Chapter 5 gives an overview of the findings of the study and those findings related to research. Limitations and delimitations are explained in Chapter 5 along with surprises from the study and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Related Literature

Overview

The issue of American education reform is decades old, and the quest for meaningful educational change is more vital now than ever. American students' test scores are on a precipitous decline when compared with students in other countries. They are especially deficient in mathematics and science, and educators and researchers are scrambling to find the root cause of the problem and to develop innovative ways to solve it. When looking at test scores, all parties involved in education agree that someone must be held accountable when students fail to achieve. In an effort to maximize all schools' abilities to meet students' needs, all states have accountability standards. The passage of NCLB in 2001 has further defined our nation's expectations for improved student achievement. The National Commission on Excellence in Education's report to the American people in 1983 called for educational reform. The commission stated, "In a world of ever-accelerating competition and change in the conditions of the workplace, of ever-greater danger, and of ever-larger opportunities for those prepared to meet them, educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 14). Schneider stated, "Despite more than a decade of intensive efforts at school reform, families, teachers, and policymakers continue to demand more effective strategies to improve the academic productivity of American schools" (Coleman et al., 1997, p. 1).

The SCTAP encompasses many of today's most popular reform efforts, including teacher incentive pay, PLCs, and teacher evaluation. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the SCTAP (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013) on middle-level teacher dispositions.

The South Carolina State Department of Education began providing SCTAP training to the school under study in the 2010-2011 school year. The South Carolina State Department of Education gave full support to the school through ongoing funding and training. The school of focus had 2 years of full implementation with the SCTAP professional development model. The purpose of this implementation was to improve student success as measured by the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards. Improvement for the school of study was noted at the highest level, level 5, for both years, 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.

The conceptual framework of this study is based on the SCTAP development model, Usher et al.'s (2003) five dispositions of effective teachers, and the researcher's own experiences and knowledge. The SCTAP model was based on an initiative launched in 1999 by the Milken Family Foundation. It is now under the auspices of the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET). TAP encourages teachers to grow professionally and personally by offering innovative opportunities for professional entry and training, along with compensation and career advancement possibilities. It honors the essence of teaching while changing the structure of the teaching profession (NIET, 2014).

The key elements of TAP focus on improving teacher performance. As teachers move up in the ranks of their profession, increases in compensation are commensurate with increased responsibilities, relevant qualifications, better performance, and participation in professional development. Another driving force for teachers to improve is the possibility of market-driven, performance-based compensation, enabling those deemed master teachers to earn as much as \$75,000 per year. Along with additional compensation comes an increased emphasis on performance-based accountability as

determined by student progress, academic achievement, and demonstration of performance. Peer review could be yet another element of teacher professional advancement. Providing teachers interested in career advancement with professional development opportunities is vital to them achieving their goals. When teachers have the chance to collaborate and to learn from each other, all of them are able to grow as members of an effective learning community. The ultimate objective putting TAP into place is to empower teachers to become more effective in the classroom and to have a positive impact on students' lives (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013).

Evidence of Existing Trends Related to Cluster

Professional growth. To positively influence teacher effectiveness in the classroom, schools must implement coherent, meaningful professional development programs and ensure that teachers are given adequate time and support to put what they have learned into practice. When teachers receive professional development as well as adequate support, implementation of these strategies will effect positive change in the classroom. Positive change in instruction increases student achievement. One effective professional development is the PLC. The term PLC applies to administrators, teachers, support staff, and parents who unite together in a common cause and who are dedicated to helping students succeed.

PLC was first coined by Rick and Becky Dufour. Along with Robert Eaker, the Dufours have written a number of books about the benefits of schools which function as PLCs. Eaker, Dufour, and Dufour (2002) researched the effectiveness of the PLCs' collaborative culture. The authors also emphasized the importance of teachers' complete involvement in their school's daily life (Eaker et al.).

In a TAP school, teams of teachers work together in groups called clusters. While

not specifically defined, a cluster has all of the characteristics of a PLC. The group of administrators, teachers, and support staff work together to develop and put into place a vision for success (Hord, 2005). Hord (2005) noted, “As an organizational arrangement, the PLC is seen as a powerful staff-development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement” (p. 57).

In a school that functions as a PLC, the team is the driving engine of the collaborative culture. Individual teachers give up a degree of personal autonomy in exchange for collective authority to answer the most critical questions of teaching and learning. The teams work together to clarify the intended outcomes of the standard course of study and develop goals and instructional units to achieve them. As a team, they work together to analyze student data, draw conclusions, and establish team improvement skills (Eaker et al., 2002). Supporting and sharing strategies as they work together are vital; without the team approach, the teachers would be operating in isolation.

Collaboration is essential to developing an effective professional community. Collective learning and application, a shared vision and values, as well as shared personal practices, will make qualified teachers even more effective (Hord, 2005). Schmoker (1999) wrote, “People accomplish more together than in isolation; regular, collective dialogue about an agreed upon focus sustains commitment and feeds purpose; effort thrives on concrete evidence of progress and teachers learn best from other teachers” (p. 55). In McClure (2008), researcher Ken Futernick concluded that teachers felt greater personal satisfaction when they believed in their own efficacy, were involved in decision making, and established strong collegial relationships. He reached this conclusion after surveying 2,000 current and former teachers in California (McClure, 2008).

According to Tuckman (1965), clusters experience stages of group development that influence their attitudes and dispositions. Initially, teams go through the forming stage. Team members' attitudes during this stage are characterized as polite but guarded. This reticence can be attributed to their not yet having had the opportunity to develop collaborative relationships that would foster trust. The second stage of group development is storming. During this stage, team members may become frustrated with the process and often demonstrate adversarial attitudes and dispositions. The next stage is norming. This stage is organizational and gives team members experience in confronting critical issues while developing rules and procedures for governance. Finally, teams experience the performing stage. At this level, team members exhibit characteristics of true collaboration by investing in joint projects and celebrating their collective success.

The effectiveness of professional development in school is exemplified at Viewmont Elementary School in Hickory, North Carolina. The principal explains how his once-struggling school became a community of learners dedicated to reaching and teaching all students (Waddell & Lee, 2008). Waddell and Lee (2008) created a culture of inquiry and made a commitment to do whatever it took to reach all of their students. The staff was committed to reflection, research, and, most of all, professional growth as they began to think of themselves as learners as well as teachers.

In a policy brief, Miller (2003) stated that professional development is the best approach to improving teacher knowledge and skills and is critical to maintaining teacher effectiveness. At times, however, despite its effectiveness, professional development is underutilized. Because positive, well-planned professional development is vital to changing policies that do not work, it should be implemented as a tool for helping

teachers to grow and to meet their students' needs. In an Education Week (2001) Quality Counts report, for example, 28% of teachers surveyed said that during the previous year they had had no training in understanding and using state standards. Sixty-eight percent of teachers noted that they had "some" or "little" access to training in state assessments. This lack of training has a direct and negative impact on classroom instruction.

According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (2009), PLCs have shifted the focus of school reform from restructuring to reculturing. The Center's contention was that the PLC concept is often inappropriately used to describe a committee or any weekly meeting in which the participants undertake data-based decision making. PLCs are more than data sharing meetings. Instead, a PLC is an ongoing process that is based on a fundamental belief in building teacher leadership as a means of bringing about school improvement. By working in a PLC, teachers can enhance their leadership abilities while working as members of ongoing, high-performing, collaborative teams that focus on student learning. Principals are currently making efforts at reform, and PLCs have emerged as one way to improve teacher performance. This improved instruction in turn leads to an increase in student achievement (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. 2009).

PLCs work so well because of the expressed belief in the power of teachers to effect change. This belief correlates with the generally accepted idea that improvement in classroom instruction is instrumental in improving student achievement. Many PLCs operate with the understanding that achievement improves when educators are invested in their jobs and are committed to being lifelong learners. The National Staff Development Council recognized the importance of PLCs to school improvement and to high-quality, ongoing professional development. The Annenberg Institute for School Reform

identified PLCs as a central element for effective professional development in any comprehensive reform initiative (Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement, 2009).

Ample research has been conducted to show the positive effects PLCs have on student achievement. Researchers Hughes and Kritsonis (2007) selected a sample of high schools from a school database with staff who attended PLC workshops and were implementing PLCs. The mean length of time the 64 sample schools reported functioning as a PLC was 2.5 years. During a 3-year period, 90.6% of these schools reported an increase in standardized math scores; 81.3% reported an increase in English/language arts scores. After conducting their research, they concluded that PLCs empower the faculty and administration to work collectively to provide quality instruction and to improve student learning.

Action research conducted in North Carolina validates the PLC concept. Case studies of three elementary schools showed that during a 5-year period, students from minority and low-income families improved their scores on state achievement tests from less than 50% proficiency to 75% proficiency. Strahan (2003) conducted interviews to examine the role of a collaborative culture on instruction. He found that PLCs were a common characteristic in all of the schools. State achievement tests were not the only measure of improvement. After putting PLCs in place, all three schools reported gains in common assessment and district tests as well. While these findings are not offered as research-based evidence of the efficacy of PLCs, they do indicate that they can help improve teaching practices.

The literature devoted to the study of PLCs and their characteristics shows that collaboration is an integral part of their success. Kardos and Johnson (2007) conducted a

survey of a representative sample of first and second year K-12 teachers in California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan. They concluded that school leaders who foster collaboration among novice and veteran teachers can improve teacher retention and satisfaction. The study further indicated that this improvement was due in part to the school leaders' establishment of a school with an integrated professional culture where all teachers share responsibility for student success.

A report issued by the U.S. Department of Education (2008) offered evidence of the importance of teacher collaboration. Evidence showed that collaboration among teachers frequently contributed to improved instruction within 35 chronically low performing schools. These schools achieved dramatic results and made substantial gains in student achievement within 3 years. The National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance Institute of Education Science (2008) also completed several case studies and concluded that teacher collaboration can be achieved in a variety of ways. In some schools, teachers met in teams to determine how well student work met the standards. When meeting in these teams, the teachers used their collective knowledge and experience to select goals for instructional improvement. Teachers in other schools shared a common planning time and studied available data to guide instructional decision making. As they worked on their goals and strategies, the team of teachers received support from a coach or lead teacher. In other situations, teachers met more informally to plan practices that would ensure that lessons were aligned across grade level.

According to Miller (2003), the U.S. Department of Education has identified the characteristics shared by successful professional development programs. First of all, any successful program depends on adequate long-range planning and the time and resources to implement it fully. The plan must also be the product of collaboration among the

teachers who participate in the program. To ensure its effectiveness, the program must not only focus on the teachers as central learners but recognize the importance of all members of the learning community. Finally, the plan must reflect the best available research on teaching, learning, and leadership.

Frequently when a school or district commits to its professional development program, the program fails to encompass the aforementioned characteristics. Therefore, administrators who hope to incorporate collaboration into their school programs must make sure that the collaboration is genuine and does not merely mimic teamwork.

Schmoker (1999) asserted that one of the problems hindering the successful implementation of collaboration into a school is the elusiveness of a definition of what collegiality really is. Effective collaboration is much more than a group meeting; the participants must have unity of purpose and a common desire to help children succeed. Schmoker went on to say that group meetings, if not genuinely collegial, can be ineffective and even counterproductive. When meetings are held to no purpose, they waste time and can even drive teachers further apart.

When teams do work together for a common goal, the results are encouraging. Northview Elementary school in Manhattan, Kansas, for example, achieved significant gains between 1983 and 1989. During this time, the principal challenged the teachers to work in teams and to meet regularly; as they analyzed the scores, the teachers worked together to identify their students' strengths and weaknesses and to develop appropriate instructional strategies (Schmoker 1999). The students made substantial gains on district reading and math tests in Grades 4 and 6. In reading, the fourth-grade passing rate rose from 59% to 100%; and in sixth grade, the passing rate rose from 41% to 97%. The passing rate for fourth-grade math rose from 70% to 100%, and the sixth grade passing

rate rose from 31% to 97 %.

Schmoker (1999) asserted that effective teamwork is the result of carefully conducted experimentation with new practices which are assessed for effectiveness. To be effective, a team must study proposed plans of action before impulsively putting them into place. Too often, educators desperate for results adopt unproven “solutions,” which fail to deliver as promised. Schmoker also contended that a team must have follow-up meetings to discuss the effectiveness of the strategies they have used.

The ideas developed by Schmoker (1999) seem to have a significant correlation to TAP. In a TAP school, groups of teachers are placed in clusters to set goals for student improvement based on student data which have been analyzed. A TAP cluster meets regularly for no less than 90 minutes, and decisions that are made are based on research and actual student strengths and weaknesses as noted on district and classroom assessments.

TAP defines a cluster as a PLC (NIET, 2014). Researchers Eaker, Defour, and Burnette in Rentfro (2007) described the three major themes of the PLC framework: (a) a solid foundation consisting of collaboratively developed and widely shared mission, vision, values, and goals; (b) collaborative teams that work interdependently to achieve common goals; and (c) a focus on results as evidenced by a commitment to continuous improvement. Huffman and Hipp (2003) described a PLC as a situation where professionals come together frequently and regularly to reflect on their practices, to assess their effectiveness, to study areas in need of attention in a social context, and to make sound decisions about moving forward with their program.

The cluster concept was implemented at the school of study where teachers in each grade level met for 1 hour each week. Reading, mathematics, science, and social

studies teachers had common planning periods by grade level to facilitate their ability to plan together. Exploratory teachers, who were considered to be one cluster, also met as a group once a week.

According to Oliver, Hipp, and Huffman (2003), developing trusting relationships is essential to the successful collaboration. A participant reported, “We are becoming more willing to share with each other. That is part of what I think is building a trusting atmosphere” (p. 55). Kruse and Louis (1995) identified trust as an impetus to collegiality: “It induces a sense of loyalty, commitment and effectiveness necessary to maintain a shared focus on students” (p. 38). Fostering a sense of trust is an essential part of a good working relationship.

Evidence of Existing Trends Related to Incentive Pay

Another reform effort directly affecting teachers is the compensation or performance pay concept. The idea of paying teachers based on performance is hardly new. In fact, a type of merit pay was proposed as early as 1918. Few details of the plans are available, but 48% of surveyed U.S. school districts had a form of merit pay in place. These plans did not last, and by 1923, only 18% of districts retained merit pay practices. In the 1940s and 1950s, most school systems instituted the kinds of uniform salary systems that are still widely used (Podgursky & Springer, 2006). The next push to reject uniform salary compensation systems came about following the USSR’s successful launch of Sputnik. With the success of our greatest competitor in the race for space, scientists, politicians, and the military expressed strong fears that the United States was falling behind other nations in technology. Unsurprisingly, this fear and blame were shifted to the public school system which faced increased pressure to hire better teachers and improve student performance. As a result, the compensation reform effort was

resurrected in a variety of ways.

One attempt at successful implementation of merit pay took place in Fairfax County where merit pay was adopted in 1987 and fully implemented in 165 schools by 1989. Teachers were eligible for up to 9% of their salary in additional merit-based raises. The plan ultimately failed due to budget cuts by administration, lack of union support, and the belief that the disparity in salaries was breaking down collegiality (Lopez, 2010).

Numerous efforts to institute performance pay and career ladder programs were tried in the 1980s through the 1990s after *A Nation at Risk* was released (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Arizona started its career ladder program at this time. While many other compensation reform efforts have been abolished, the Arizona Career Ladder system is still in place after more than 2 decades (Center for Educator Compensation Reform, n.d.a). A study done in 2007 evaluated the effects of the Arizona Career Ladder on student achievement and indicated that students in Career Ladder schools were performing significantly better on the state-mandated “AIMS” assessment measures than students in noncareer ladder schools. The most dramatic impact was greatest in math and reading (Lopez, 2010).

When Tennessee implemented the Tennessee Career Ladder Evaluation System in 1984, the system combined professional development with financial rewards and other career incentives. Although the plan was voluntary for veteran teachers, participation was mandatory for new hires (Williamson, 2010). Dee and Keys in Lopez (2010) looked at the program to determine whether or not the students of the teacher participants had higher test scores. The results indicated that students in classrooms with a Career Ladder teacher scored three percentile points higher on a mathematic achievement test and two percentile points higher in reading achievement.

Another study conducted by Milanowski in Lopez (2010) found similar results in Cincinnati public schools where a high-quality teacher assessment system identified teachers whose students performed better on tests. These results were used as justification for paying more to teachers whose students' scores were higher. Yet another study showed that teacher competence was more important to student achievement than any other factor in education. In fact, no other popular reform movements, such as decreased class size, more technology, an increase in the number of charter schools, and school choice, had the same impact as a knowledgeable, dedicated classroom teacher (Lopez, 2010). The study concluded that quality teaching produced a 0.91 standard deviation gain in student achievement.

For the vast majority of U.S. public school teachers, salaries are based on two variables: the highest academic degree a teacher has earned and the number of years he or she has taught. More than 96% of public school districts pay teachers according to this kind of salary schedule (Podgursky & Springer, 2006). School districts spend more on teachers' salaries and benefits than any other expenditure; yet, they frequently do not spend these funds in a way that would improve the performance, quality, or distribution of the teacher workforce. This simplistic formula for paying teachers, which does nothing to distinguish between effective and ineffective teaching, could actually dissuade some of the best teacher candidates from entering the profession. High poverty schools, with their added challenges, are especially disadvantaged by this formulaic approach (Chait, 2007).

Because of its shortcomings, the present compensation formula may be in for an overhaul as state and district policymakers acknowledge that the single salary schedule is not meeting their needs. The Center for American Progress (2007) supported paying

teachers based on their teaching assignments, skills, and abilities to improve student achievement. The Center explained that performance-based compensation has the potential to improve teacher quality, to address teacher shortages in difficult-to-fill positions, and to ensure a more equitable distribution of effective teachers.

No aspect of education eclipses the importance of the classroom teacher. All students profit when they are taught by caring and competent professionals. Children in poverty especially benefit from being with adults who not only convey the subject matter clearly but also relate to and care about children as people, not just as students. In fact, teachers who are fully committed to their jobs and who are highly skilled can boost student learning by as much as a year (Chait, 2007).

Pay-for-performance policies are designed to reward superior teaching and to incentivize promising young people to enter the profession (Podgursky & Springer, 2006). Most performance-based proposals are tied to student achievement; other programs reward teachers for their demonstrations of knowledge and teaching expertise. Bonuses are paid on top of a base salary, and programs may reward individual teachers, groups of teachers, or both (Chait, 2007). In CAP's report, researcher Dan Goldhaber (Chait, 2007) found that teacher pay reform is more likely to be successful if it takes place at the state level. State reforms are more likely to be successful because the states have a greater ability to implement the data systems needed to identify deficient areas, to assess teacher performance, and to implement a differentiated pay system.

Though educational level and years of experience are the primary determinants of teachers' salaries, recent research has established that neither factor is a significant predictor of teacher quality. Students whose teachers have graduate degrees perform no better on average than students whose teachers lack the advanced degrees. The effects of

experience on student achievement appear to be insignificant in all but the first 2 years of a teacher's career (Aaronson, Barrow, & Sander, 2007). Pay increases based on education and experience also come at a high price to public schools. The average school spends more than 20% of its teacher salary allocations on automatic pay raises for education and experience alone (Podgursky & Springer, 2006).

Walsh and Tracy (2004) stated that half of all teachers in the United States hold a master's degree, and the number of teachers in the United States with a master's degree has nearly doubled in the last 50 years. The primary reason for this increase is that an advanced degree is marketed as an indicator of a teacher's quality and a guarantee of a higher salary. Research cited later in the literature review clearly indicates, however, that an advanced degree does not necessarily lead to greater effectiveness as a teacher. Despite the lack of evidence supporting the necessity of advanced degrees, school districts award higher salaries—11% more on average—to teachers with master's degrees. School districts also make getting a degree more affordable by subsidizing most or all of the tuition. In 1996, school districts spent an estimated \$19 billion to help teachers earn advanced degrees (Walsh & Tracy, 2004). Most of this money did little to alter classroom success.

Another reason these degrees do not necessarily lead to better teaching is the fact that most teachers earn these degrees in the field of education, rather than in the subject matter they teach. When a teacher is trying to help students grasp mathematics concepts, scientific theories, or reading skills, degrees in areas such as leadership or curriculum have little value. Even at the secondary level, where teachers are certified in the subject they are most qualified to teach, only 22% of advanced degrees are in the teacher's college major or minor. At the elementary level, only a small fraction of these degrees

(7%) is in an academic subject. Ironically, one study conducted by researchers Ehreberg and Brewer (Center for Educator Compensation Reform, n.d.b) suggested that for some teachers, having a master's degree could lead to their having a slightly negative impact on student achievement.

As the connection between higher education, length of service, and better teaching remains unproven, the pressure to find better ways to pay and reward teachers continues to mount. One popular suggestion is to tie teacher pay directly to student achievement. Under this plan, schools would use test scores, classroom evaluations, and other measures of teacher productivity to determine salaries. Finding evidence on the effects of performance-based pay requires more research. To that end, the federal government has appropriated billions of dollars to finance and evaluate performance-based pay programs. In 2006, Congress created the Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF), an initiative that awards grants to districts and states that implement performance-based pay programs. The Department of Education has allocated \$4.35 billion for the Race to the Top Fund, a program that awards state-level grants for major education reforms. The first round of grants was awarded in March for proposals from Delaware and Tennessee, both of which contained performance-based pay elements (U.S. Department of Education Policy and Program Studies Service, n.d.).

Further research (Rockoff, 2004) shows that a teacher's education level and years of experience have a negligible effect on student performance. If those traditional criteria do not improve student performance, then educators and researchers must determine what other factors might work better. These same educators and researchers also face the challenge of exactly how to measure these other factors to insure that they are consistently connected to improved performance for all students.

A study on the SCTAP model by the Working Group on Quality (Lopez, 2010) found that the students of teachers who participated in TAP showed greater gains in achievement than the students of teachers in a control group. The Working Group on Quality first analyzed student achievement gains at two levels of comparison—teacher-to-teacher and school-to-school. Dr. June Rivers of SAS Institute Inc. utilized SAS EVAAS. This system uses student test score data from TAP schools and control schools to calculate individual teachers' value-added gains. This information is used to determine performance bonuses. A by-product of these calculations is the ability to compare student achievement growth from TAP teachers and schools to such growth from control teachers and schools.

The system of performance-based compensation for teachers is based on a value-added model based on the teachers' responsibilities, instructional performance, and student achievement. The performance compensation is broken down into percentages with observations accounting for 40%, individual added scores 30%, and school value-added goals 30%. The average incentive pay across the state in 2009-2010 was approximately \$2,000 with a range of \$0-\$10,000 in performance bonuses.

Administrative incentives are also available in many TAP schools, giving administrators an additional stake in teacher and student performance. In 2010, these bonuses ranged from \$0-\$14,000 and were calculated with 75% of the compensatory amounts being based on school-wide value-added growth and 25% being based on the TAP Annual Review score, which measures the fidelity of TAP implementation in the school (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013).

In evaluating TAP teachers and schools, evaluators calculated each teacher's effect on student progress by assessing the difference between students' actual average

scores and their expected average scores. The estimated progress of students is determined by looking at their previous scores. The teachers themselves were judged according to an objective formula which divided an individual teacher's effect by the associated standard error. By using this formula, the group determined how many standard error units a teacher's effect was from the average teacher's estimate and placed each teacher in one of five categories—below (score of 1 and 2), at (score of 3), or above the average teacher's estimate (score of 4 and 5). Standard error units indicate what proportion of the teachers, TAP and otherwise, do *statistically* better than average and what proportion do *statistically* worse than the growth average as determined by the control group of teachers.

In every state, TAP consistently demonstrated more success in raising the student success rate than teachers without TAP training. In fact, TAP schools outperformed the control schools in 57% of the categories in math and in 67% of the categories in reading. A comparison of the teachers' performances at individual schools showed that the TAP teachers outperformed the control group in 67% of the categories in math and in 100% of the categories in reading (Solomon, White, Cohen, & Woo, 2007).

Teacher Effectiveness

Teaching is arguably the most important job in the public sector, and K-12 education is easily the most vital of public investments (Daley & Kim, 2010). Research conducted in Tennessee shows that teacher effectiveness is the single most important school-based factor in student success. Students who have highly effective teachers for 3 years in a row will score 50 percentile points higher on achievement tests than students who have less effective teachers in that same period (Varlas, 2009). Other academic research has emerged demonstrating that the single most important factor related to

increased student achievement is the competency of the classroom teacher (Agam, Reifsneider, & Wardell, 2006).

Markley (2004) explained Wenglinsky's research on the identification of practices that improve student outcomes. This research was built on the work of Sanders and Rivers, among others. The data that provided the basis for the study came from the eighth-grade science report of NAEP. Wenglinsky acknowledged that his study was limited and that further research is warranted before definitive conclusions can be drawn. The research showed that teacher input, professional development, and classroom practices all influence student achievement. The most significant of the three areas was classroom practices, especially those geared toward high-order thinking (Markley, 2004).

Higher-order thinking skills, however, can only be taught effectively by a teacher who possesses those types of skills himself or herself. A significant body of research suggests, in fact, that even disadvantaged students can make academic progress when taught by a highly skilled teacher. Research exists indicating that if a class of disadvantaged children was to have exceptional teachers for 5 consecutive years, the economic achievement gap could be closed (Varlas, 2009). Unfortunately, the odds that any child, let alone a disadvantaged child, will have such teachers for that length of time are one in 17,000 (Varlas, 2009). Darling-Hammond studied data from the 1993-1994 Schools and Staffing Surveys and the NAEP data to gauge teacher effectiveness. The results indicated that states such as North Carolina, which invested heavily in improvements to teacher quality and student accountability, showed the greatest gains on NAEP assessments (Varlas, 2009). Such data further validate the importance of the classroom teacher to the academic well-being of the child.

Despite the overwhelming need for talented teachers, traditional evaluation

instruments for teachers are inadequate. Having advanced degrees and accumulating years of classroom experience have an insignificant impact on student achievement (Daley & Kim, 2010). The individual teacher's effectiveness in the classroom matters more than any other factor. From a policy perspective, if teacher preparation matters most, more public resources should go to preparatory education programs that work. If other qualifications matter most, screening teachers for those qualifications would increase teacher competency. However, since student achievement growth is more closely related to teacher qualities that are *not* identified by these characteristics, researchers and policymakers are turning their attention to the individual teacher's performance in the classroom as the key to improving instruction. This perspective implies that instructional practices vary from teacher to teacher and that school systems must find better ways to evaluate teachers and to help them improve as needed.

Although the research overwhelmingly supports the importance of the classroom teacher, a clear definition of effective teaching remains elusive. As the evidence mounts proving that teachers have a greater impact on student achievement than any other factor, the necessity for clear ways to identify good teaching increases as well. It is therefore incumbent on educators and researchers to develop a comprehensive definition of teacher effectiveness, adequate professional support, a workable evaluation process, and incentives for those teachers who meet established standards of excellence.

In too many cases, a student's knowledge is evaluated primarily according to test scores, and a teacher's effectiveness is evaluated primarily according to his or her perceived contribution to that test score (Goe, Bell, & Little, 2008). Although student scores on standardized tests can be useful gauges of a teacher's effect, they should not be the sole criteria. Test scores alone, however, give an incomplete understanding of what

takes place in the classroom. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that all students do not take tests in all areas, furthering obscuring the usefulness of the scores. Defining teacher effectiveness is about more than creating a simplistic, one-dimensional view of the undeniable important profession. “It is a dramatic conceptual shift,” says ASCD Executive Director Gene Carter, “from focusing exclusively on the teacher to focusing on the act of learning” (Varlas, 2009, p. 1). The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (NCCTQ) suggested extending the definition of teacher effectiveness “beyond teachers’ contribution to student achievement gains to include how teachers impact classrooms, schools, and their colleagues as well as how they contribute to other important outcomes for students” (Goe et al., 2008, p. 43).

Attempts to simplify definitions of teacher effectiveness undercut efforts of those who genuinely wish to improve the profession. In truth, teacher effectiveness should be measured by analyzing a wide range of student and school data. A research synthesis for NCCTQ (Goe et al., 2008) explained the components required to be an effective teacher.

First of all, good teachers have high expectations and use positive reinforcement to help students set their own goals and work to achieve them. These goals go beyond the classroom into the areas of work ethic and civic responsibility. The most successful teachers also use a variety of resources and strategies to engage even the most difficult students. When teachers model a love of learning, students can better understand the importance of learning in their own lives. Finally, good teachers do not hesitate to work with other teachers, parents, and community members to ensure the success of all students. This definition of teacher effectiveness was developed by analyzing research, policies, and standards that addressed teacher effectiveness. After Goe et al. (2008) compiled this working definition, he consulted other experts and strengthened the

definition based on their feedback.

More in-depth research by Stronge and Hindman (2003) has synthesized their findings about teacher effectiveness and classified them into six domains. Domain one looks at the qualities effective teachers bring to the classroom. The researchers noted that teachers who are experienced, articulated, and knowledgeable are better prepared to reach children and help improve their achievement.

The second domain looks at the teacher as a person. Stronge and Hindman's (2003) research noted that effective teachers "exhibit caring and fairness; have a positive attitude about life and teaching; are reflective thinkers about their craft and have high expectations for themselves and their students" (p. 51).

The third domain looks at teachers' classroom management and organizational abilities. Stronge and Hindman's (2003) conclusion was that an effective teacher has mastered strategies for maintaining a safe, orderly, positive, and productive learning environment.

Teachers with a clear plan for the instructional day are in the fourth domain. Stronge and Hingman (2003) concluded that effective teachers do three consistent things each day. They prioritize and develop clear goals for student achievement. They allocate time judiciously by minimizing disruptions and creating a positive learning environment. Finally, they devise and implement high expectations for themselves and their students.

Stronge and Hindman's (2003) fifth domain identified teacher effectiveness by the way a teacher implements instruction. According to the researchers, an effective teacher fosters better learning through instruction that meets individual needs through the use of such strategies as hands-on learning, problem solving, questioning, guided practice, and feedback (Stronge & Hindman).

Monitoring student progress and potential makes up the sixth domain. Stronge and Hindman (2003) concluded that effective teachers frequently monitor student performance and adapt the instructional strategies as necessary to address the learning needs of their students. The researchers asserted that the primary goal of an effective teacher is to adjust instruction so that all students in the classroom achieve, regardless of the range of student abilities (Stronge & Hindman, 2003).

The qualifications by which teachers are evaluated and compensated have been shown to be poor predictors of a teacher's ability to reach students and facilitate learning. Adding to the problem is the infrequency of meaningful classroom observations. Principals rarely observe teachers more than once a year. Unless an egregious problem is apparent, he or she usually gives the teacher a strong evaluation. Ideally, administrators should conduct more frequent observations to improve teacher performance and student achievement. Both policymakers and members of the public would prefer a better approach to evaluations, including observations throughout the year and valid measures of effectiveness. By determining which teachers are best at their jobs and why, administrators should be able to use that information to help all teachers improve.

Equally as important as classroom competence is the teacher's relationship with students. Studying the ways students and teachers interact allows researchers to determine which teaching behaviors have the most positive impact on students. Teachers play such an important role in students' lives that they must be ever cognizant of the impact they have. Because of their influence, teachers must stay up to date on their subject matter and be ever aware of the values they impart on the young people for whom they are responsible (Avalos, Pazos-Rego, Cuevas, Massey, & Schumm, 2009).

One of the most important yet difficult to measure traits of successful teachers is

the self-confidence they convey to their students. This confidence is evident in the teachers' dissemination of material and also in the teachers' connections with their students, especially those who are most at risk of failure. These teachers handle situations with fairness and understanding, enabling them to relate better with all students. Just as self-confidence can increase teachers' abilities to help students, a lack of self-confidence can do the opposite. Teachers who are unsure of themselves are less likely to establish high expectations or to help children develop a feeling of self-worth and value (Avalos et al., 2009).

Research on success in teaching makes frequent reference to the term *efficacy* and the way that efficacy relates to teacher effectiveness. For the purpose of this study, efficacy is defined as teacher confidence in his/her own ability to promote student learning. This definition was first used in *Changes in Teacher Efficacy during the Early Years of Teaching* (Hoy, 2000). Research conducted over a 30-year period suggests that success or failure may be dependent on a teacher's belief in his or her own ability to affect students in a positive way (Hoy, 2000).

In 2007, a review of research by Jerald in Protheroe (2008) highlighted the teacher behaviors found to be relevant to a teacher's sense of efficacy. The following teacher behaviors were noted: teachers with a stronger sense of efficacy tend to exhibit a greater level of planning and organization, are more open to new ideas, are more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students, are more persistent and resilient when things do not go smoothly, are less critical of students when they make errors, and are less inclined to refer a difficult student to special education (Protheroe, 2008). Teacher efficacy, however, is not a solitary accomplishment. Collective teacher efficacy as defined by Hoy (2000) is an agreement by all faculty and

staff that they can achieve greater success by working as a team with a common goal. That goal is to reach out to students and to help each one reach his or her full potential. This attitude is especially important when teachers are working with students who are disadvantaged or difficult to reach.

The findings of Smith, Skarbek, and Hurst in Kirchner (2008) explained the findings concerning the dispositions of effective teachers. They condensed 40 years' worth of terminology on teacher dispositions into the following: attitudes, beliefs, personality, affective traits, characteristics, and teacher perceptions. Other studies have shown that effective teachers communicate concern and respect in a professional manner, develop personal connections in order to meet student needs, and bring out the best in all students (Kirchner, 2008). Kirchner also cited an additional study in which students at all grade levels said the personal attributes of the teacher him/herself had the strongest impact on student learning.

The Gallup Organization has been studying human nature and behavior for more than 75 years. The organization defines effective teacher traits as talents, which are innate thoughts, feelings, or behaviors. Gallup's research revealed as well that the most important characteristics of good teachers are "subject matter knowledge, refined teaching skills and most importantly talent" (Gordon, 2003, p. 1). Although talent cannot be taught, with the proper training, teachers can identify, develop, and refine the skills they possess. Miller (2003) affirmed Gallup's findings about the importance of effective teacher preparation. College teacher preparation programs should focus on ensuring that graduates have strong content expertise and are equipped to use research-based instructional strategies.

To ensure that prospective teachers have gained these competencies, several

states, including North Carolina, Indiana, and Kansas, have implemented or have begun the move toward performance-based teacher licensure systems. Kansas, for example, has developed a performance-based licensure system in which teacher candidates receive a 2-year conditional license upon completion of a teacher preparation program. In order to receive a professional teaching license, teachers are required to complete a performance assessment developed by a committee of practitioners and higher education faculty. Teachers select a unit on which they would like to be assessed. They administer pretests and posttests on that unit and turn in a report to the state department of education. The report includes student demographic data and a self-reflection component, which details why the teacher believes students did or did not learn and what that teacher might do differently in the future. The move towards a performance-based licensure system provides states with a uniform way to clearly evaluate teachers based on a clear model (Miller, 2003).

One way to strengthen the evaluation process is to utilize TAP, a research-based system that ties quality of instruction to student achievement (Center for Teacher and Student Advancement, 2013). To clarify the meaning of effective instruction, TAP's creators identified the knowledge and skills that teachers need to teach successfully and that evaluators need to create standards and rubrics to measure teaching performance. By reviewing the standards of teacher accountability nationwide and using Danielson's research, the creators of TAP developed their own teacher accountability standards (NIET, 2014).

The TAP system of teacher evaluation supersedes other instruments by differentiating between effective and ineffective teaching. In contrast, most other systems are structured so as to allow almost all teachers to receive a rating of satisfactory.

The TAP instructional rubric sets high expectations for teachers to attain. The TAP rubric is used to measure a teacher's effectiveness in the following four domains: (a) instructional design and planning, (b) the learning environment, (c) instruction, and (d) responsibilities. The rubric is designed to identify degrees of proficiency on a variety of indicators; it is unrealistic to expect a teacher to receive the maximum score of 5 on every indicator during an evaluation. As a result, the wide distribution of individual teacher performance ratings in TAP schools provides a more accurate representation of teacher instruction. For example, during the 2007-2008 school year, teacher ratings on the TAP instructional rubric ranged from a score of 1 to 4.95, with a median score of 3.57. TAP also requires more evaluations in a year than most other systems. In a TAP school each year, teachers are observed four to six times. When more observations are done with the goal of enhancing instruction, teachers can improve their performance and become more self-confident.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

According to Barbara Schneider, “Despite more than a decade of intensive efforts at school reform, families, teachers, and policymakers continue to demand more effective strategies to improve the academic productivity of American schools” (Coleman et al., 1997, p. 1). One of those strategies is based on Dewey’s assertion that children respond directly to the dispositions and attitudes of their teachers; therefore, determining which dispositions, attitudes, or actions are most beneficial for students is essential (Richardson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As David Perkins has argued, positive dispositions are important, and even if they are not innate, they can be developed through practice, reflection, encouragement, and direction (Bentley, 1998). Therefore, the impact of professional development on teacher dispositions requires further research.

This qualitative study examined components implemented in schools and explained their impacts, if any, on specific teacher dispositions. The implementation of the TAP professional development model was successful at the school of study as evidenced by its having received the level 5 each year. This case followed the design and methods of an exploratory case study. As stated by Tellis (1997), a “case study can be seen to satisfy the three tenets of the qualitative method: describing, understanding, and explaining” (p. 3). At the conclusion of the study, the results of professional development on teacher performance were evaluated.

Case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process Cases are bound by time and activity, and researchers collected detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. (Creswell, 2009, p. 13)

The researcher studied this professional development model and the school's process for implementation of the model. The data collections used were a survey, focus group, and individual interviews. These data were collected and examined as they related to three areas of the SCTAP model: professional development, pay-for-performance, and effective teaching.

In this chapter, the researcher has described the research methodology in detail. These details include the researcher's selection process for the participants, methods used to collect data, and the method of data analysis. The researcher has also addressed his role in the research, the trustworthiness of the study, and any problems that arose.

Participants

Participants in the study were the assistant principal; a master teacher; a mentor teacher; three classroom teachers, one each in Grades 6-8; and one special area teacher. Criterion sampling was used for teacher selection. The teachers had all worked at the school during the years in which the SCTAP model was implemented. The researcher contacted the principal for help in selecting the teacher participants. The principal provided a list of possible participants who met the researcher's criteria. The researcher then e-mailed every teacher on the list to explain the dissertation's purpose and to describe each one's possible role in the study. The final selection of the participants who took part in the study represented a cross section of the faculty, further validating the researcher's findings. By using teachers from a variety of areas, the researcher gathered information from a number of differing perspectives. These perspectives allowed the researcher to judge the success or failure of the program more accurately. By using the data garnered from the participants' real-world experiences, the researcher was better able to assess the program's viability. The researcher looked at how each participant

viewed the decision-making process, enabling him to evaluate and validate emerging themes. This careful and methodical approach to the research resulted in a more reliable study.

An accurate description of any study's participants is essential to an understanding of the data collected. To achieve this accuracy, the researcher has provided the method of selection of the target group; the number of people in the group; and the group's demographic information, including age, gender, race, and ethnicity. The information provided in the study describes each group of participants: students, teachers, parents and/or community members. Qualitative research requires such detailed descriptions so that those who access the study can determine if results might be applicable to their own situations.

Instruments

Surveys. The first data collection instrument was a survey that consisted of five to six questions for each of the dispositions in three areas of the SCTAP professional development model. The survey answers were rated from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The participants also had the chance to justify their responses at the bottom of each question. After the surveys were collected and analyzed, the data findings were displayed in a frequency chart which showed cumulative data and percentages of each response choice. The surveys allowed the researcher to determine which questions to emphasize when working with the focus group. As Creswell (2009) explained, "From sample results, the researcher generalizes or makes claims about the populations" (p. 145). When conclusions were reached about the population of study, the researcher followed up on those claims with further research.

Focus group. After assessing the results of the survey, a second data source used

for this study was a focus group. Questions for this focus group were created from the information gathered through the survey questions. The researcher used one focus group consisting of the following participants: assistant principal, master teacher, mentor teacher, three classroom teachers (one teacher per grade level Grades 6-8), and one related arts teacher.

The researcher used a focus group because people who discuss and share their ideas and opinions with others are likely to be more thoughtful when they take part in discussions. This open forum may give the participants new and useful perspectives on the issues at hand. Patton (2002) explained,

In a focus group participants get to hear each other's responses and to make additional comments beyond their own original responses as they hear what other people have to say. The object is to get high-quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others. (p. 386)

Interviews. This study's purpose was to research the impact of the TAP professional development model on teacher dispositions at a middle-level school. One data collection method was used was in-depth interviewing. Maxwell (2005) explained how research questions and interview questions complement each other: "Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people in order to gain that understanding" (p. 92). The researcher sought to discover what impact, if any, resulted from the three-series interview process.

Seidman's semi-structured three-series interview process (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) was used to conduct interviews. The participant's personal and professional backgrounds were the focus of the first interview. The second interview focused on the

school's implementation of the SCTAP professional development model. The third interview focused on the assessment of teacher dispositions in the following five areas: Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose.

Procedures

The data collection process includes data collected from approximately 30 surveys, one focus group with seven participants, and three interviews each with three different teachers for a total of nine interviews. Participants for each of the data sources were chosen based on their experiences and duties at the school.

Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the many levels of meaning that can be ascribed to a single problem. The research leads to the discovery of new information and procedures using data typically collected from participants in their own environment. This data analysis builds inductively, progressing from specific to more general themes, allowing the research to draw valid conclusions from the data provided (Creswell, 2009).

After conducting the surveys, a focus group, and interviews, the researcher transcribed the data. After transcribing the data, the researcher coded the data to find what common themes might exist. By creating a matrix, keeping field notes, and writing analytical memos, the researcher could see which themes emerged and could create more effective questions to guide the study. The researcher conducted both a single-case analysis and a cross-case analysis of the surveys, focus group, and interviews to determine if the same themes emerged in each of these types of data collection.

In-vivo coding and descriptive coding were used as the first cycle coding methods. When using in-vivo, the researcher read each transcript carefully and used the

participants' exact words to code the information. By using this coding method, the researcher respected the words and ideas of the participants. The second coding method used was descriptive or topic coding. The use of descriptive coding enabled the researcher to examine in detail the topics that emerged from the data. Using these two coding methods laid a solid foundation on which to build (Saldana, 2009).

Limitations

As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011), no research study is perfect. Researchers gather data to disseminate information to their audience, but certain necessary constraints can impose limitations on both the quality and the amount of the information conveyed. An understanding of a study's limitations is necessary to help readers know how useful the study could be to them. The study's purpose was to determine what impact, if any, the SCTAP professional development model might have on teacher dispositions. The following limitations should be considered when reading this study.

The study was framed by Usher et al.'s (2003) research on Comb's (1999) theories on the five beliefs about effective helper dispositions. Therefore, this study is viewed from that perspective. This study is limited to the descriptions and explanations given by individuals working within the school during the 2-year period that led to their attaining level 5 status. Therefore, the findings from this study are specific to only the data and conclusions described. The researcher's goal was to enable the reader to "understand the phenomena from the participant's perspective" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 77).

Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Introduction

The need for accountability has always been a significant component of effort to reform education. Every state has instituted a set of accountability standards, in part to fulfill requirements NCLB. The National Commission on Excellence in Education issued its report on education reform in 1983: *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was a dismal commentary on the state of the American public school system, leading to this conclusion, “In a world of ever-accelerating competition and change in the conditions of the workplace, of ever-greater danger, and of ever-larger opportunities for those prepared to meet them, educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society” (p. 14). The problems in the system have worsened over time even though a number of well-intentioned programs have been implemented to address the situation. Schneider stated, “Despite more than a decade of intensive efforts at school reform, families, teachers, and policymakers continue to demand more effective strategies to improve the academic productivity of American schools” (Coleman et al., 1997, p. 1).

One of these strategies is the SCTAP, a reform effort encompassing teacher incentive pay, PLCs, and more meaningful teacher evaluation. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the SCTAP (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013) on middle-level teachers’ dispositions. Understanding the impact of the professional development model on a teacher’s disposition should offer insight into which parts of the model were most beneficial to a teacher’s disposition.

The following research question guided this study: To what extent does the SCTAP professional development model impact teacher disposition within the following:

Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose?

Findings

Surveys. The survey, which was given to 23 participants, consisted of 30 questions. Of the 23 participants, 19 responded. Six questions focused on the following attributes of a teacher's disposition: Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose. For every set of six questions, two focused on cluster, two focused on evaluation, and the final two focused on incentive-based pay. A pilot study using these survey questions was completed in spring 2014. Following the pilot study, the questions were revised as needed based on the participants' responses.

The surveys were analyzed in two ways. The first set of data contains responses to statements about three areas of the SCTAP model: cluster, incentive pay, and evaluation. Responding to statements about cluster, participants affirmed their belief in cluster's correlation with the five attributes of positive teacher dispositions. The strongest correlation was in response to statement 25, with 18 of 19 participants agreeing that "Cluster helped me be more reflective about my teaching and the purpose behind my professional decision making process." Their affirmative response to statement 25 indicates that teachers were able to find meaningful purpose through cluster. The lowest of these correlations was with statement 19, with 14 of 19 participants indicating they agreed or strongly agreed that "Cluster helped me see myself with a positive, abiding and trustworthy sense of actual and potential worth, ability and capacity for growth." This statement addressed authenticity. Fewer participants agreed that the implementation of cluster enabled them to develop a feeling of self-worth and confidence in their abilities as a teacher.

The next area addressed was teacher incentive pay. The data gathered from the survey showed that fewer teachers saw a strong connection between incentive pay and teacher dispositions. This lower rating showed up in the responses to statements 16 and 28. Only 10 of 19 participants agreed or strongly agreed with those statements. Statement 16 dealt with the importance of a positive self-image, and statement 28 focused on the role of incentive pay as related to meaningful purpose. Only four of 19 participants had a favorable response to statement 21, which related authenticity to incentive pay; they overwhelmingly agreed that bonus pay would reward them for their talents as teachers but that bonus pay in itself would make no real contribution to improved classroom performance.

The last issue in the survey was teacher evaluation. Opinions regarding the merit of performance evaluations were mixed. Participants did view evaluations more positively than they viewed incentive pay. They did not, however, view evaluations as favorably as they viewed cluster. Statement 29 focused on the connection between evaluations and the participant's sense of purpose. Fourteen of 19 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that evaluations helped them reflect on their own teaching and exerted a strong influence on their decision making. The two statements receiving the fewest positive responses were 11 and 24. The focus of statement 11 was the correlation between evaluation and having a positive view of others. The survey required participants to rate the evaluation's effect on their opinions of their peers' teaching abilities. Only eight participants agreed or strongly agreed that the effect was significant, one was neutral, six disagreed, and one strongly disagreed. Number 24 focused on the link between evaluation and authenticity. When asked about the impact of evaluation on their own views about openness and honesty, respondents were somewhat negative. Only

eight agreed or strongly agreed, five were neutral, and six strongly disagreed. Most agreed that their own sense of integrity and authenticity existed independently of any effect of the evaluation process.

The attribute with the strongest positive response in all three areas of the SCTAP model was meaningful purpose. In each area, meaningful purpose elicited the highest favorable response. Positive view of self was seen as less influential and rated high only in the area of incentive pay. Participants viewed authenticity as the least effective attribute of a teacher's disposition in all three areas. In the evaluation section of the survey, scores for positive view of self were similar to the low scores for authenticity. The overview of this information was placed in a frequency chart by percentage. Tables 1-3 represent the percentage of each of the areas and what percentage impact they had on each of the five attributes.

Table 1 shows percentage results from the survey. The percentages represent participants answering questions about cluster and each of these five attributes by choosing the answers strongly agree or agree on the survey.

Table 1

Cluster with Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose

Area of TAP	Empathy Percent	Positive View of Others Percent	Positive View of Self Percent	Authenticity Percent	Meaningful Purpose Percent
Cluster	86.6	67.4	83.9	78.9	89.5

Table 2 shows the percentage results from the survey. The percentages in Table 2 represent participants answering questions about Incentive-Based Pay and each of the

five attributes by choosing the answers strongly agree or agree on the survey.

Table 2

Incentive-Based Pay with Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose

Area of TAP	Empathy Percent	Positive View of Others Percent	Positive View of Self Percent	Authenticity Percent	Meaningful Purpose Percent
Incentive-Based Pay	29	34.2	47.4	44	44.7

Table 3 shows the percentage results from the survey. The percentages in Table 3 represent participants answering questions about Evaluation and each of the five attributes by choosing the answers strongly agree or agree on the survey.

Table 3

Evaluation with Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose

Area of TAP	Empathy Percent	Positive View of Others Percent	Positive View of Self Percent	Authenticity Percent	Meaningful Purpose Percent
Evaluation	61	48.7	63.9	44.7	75.4

Findings of Surveys Connected to Disposition

Empathy. Empathy, the ability to connect emotionally with peers and students, is vital both inside and outside the classroom. Most survey participants indicated they agreed or strongly agreed that cluster and evaluation enhanced their ability to empathize with other teachers and, most importantly, with their students. Regarding the value of

teacher bonuses, fewer respondents agreed or strongly agreed that bonuses had a strong impact on teacher empathy. Most teachers felt that receiving bonuses for their performances did nothing to increase their ability to connect with others.

Table 4 represents the percentage of participants who answered agree or strongly agree on the survey on the questions about the attribute of Empathy and each of the areas of the SCTAP professional development model.

Table 4

Empathy and the Components of the SCTAP Model

Attribute	Cluster Percent	Incentive-Based Pay Percent	Evaluation Percent
Empathy	86.6	29	61

Positive view of others. Cluster continued to garner favorable responses from participants who affirmed its impact on their ability to view peers and students positively. Again, incentive-based pay proved to be of little to no value in fostering a positive self-image. Evaluation's impact on participants' positive view of self was slightly greater than it was on its positive view of others.

Table 5 represents the percentage of participants who answered agree or strongly agree on the survey questions about the attribute of Positive View of Others and each of the areas of the SCTAP professional development model.

Table 5

Positive View of Others and the Components of the SCTAP Model

Attribute	Cluster Percent	Incentive-Based Pay Percent	Evaluation Percent
Positive View of Others	67.4	34.2	48.7

Positive view of self. While participants believed that cluster had a strong impact on their view of themselves, they were less convinced of the value of incentive pay in that same area. Participants also believed that positive self-image was affected slightly more positively by evaluation than by bonus pay.

Table 6 represents the percentage of participants who answered agree or strongly agree on the survey questions about the attribute of Positive View of Self and each of the areas of the SCTAP professional development model.

Table 6

Positive View of Self and the Components of the SCTAP Model

Attribute	Cluster Percent	Incentive-Based Pay Percent	Evaluation Percent
Positive View of Self	83.9	47.4	63.9

Authenticity. Teachers who are comfortable with their own personalities and qualities have a unique success in reaching students. Young people typically recognize and dislike artifice, so a teacher who comes across as *real* and honest can use that honesty in the classroom. Teachers agreed that cluster allowed them the freedom to be

genuine. They felt that evaluation was of some use but agreed that bonus pay could and often did hinder the authenticity necessary to their success.

Table 7 represents the percentage of participants who answered agree or strongly agree on the survey questions about the attribute of Authenticity and each of the areas of the SCTAP professional development model.

Table 7

Authenticity and the Components of the SCTAP Model

Attribute	Cluster Percent	Incentive-Based Pay Percent	Evaluation Percent
Authenticity	78.9	44	44.7

Meaningful purpose. A teacher with meaningful purpose is a visionary who reflects on his or her own attributes as a teacher. The 19 survey participants agreed that this facet of a teacher's disposition was affected significantly by both the cluster and evaluation portions of SCTAP. As in other areas, bonus pay had little impact on a teacher's view of his or her career and purpose.

Table 8 represents the percentage of participants who answered agree or strongly agree on the survey on the questions about the attribute of Meaningful Purpose and each of the areas of the SCTAP professional development model.

Table 8

Empathy and the Components of the SCTAP Model

Attribute	Cluster Percent	Incentive-Based Pay Percent	Evaluation Percent
Meaningful Purpose	89.5	44.7	75.4

Findings of Focus Group Connected to Disposition

When the survey data were analyzed, the researcher conducted a focus group. This data analysis provided a direction and starting point for the focus group. The group itself allowed the researcher to explore cluster, incentive pay, and evaluation to determine their effect on teachers' dispositions.

The following participants were invited to the focus group: an assistant principal, a master teacher, a mentor teacher, three classroom teachers (one teacher per grade level Grades 6-8), and one special area teacher. Only four of the seven participants, however, were able to attend the focus group. Those four participants were the assistant principal, the master teacher, a seventh-grade math teacher, and an eighth-grade social studies teacher.

Criterion sampling was used for teacher selection. Only teachers who had worked at the school during the years of the SCTAP implementation could take part. The principal helped select the teacher participants; others who participated occupied positions specified by the requirements of the study. After receiving the list of possible participants, the researcher e-mailed each teacher to explain the dissertation's purpose and their possible role in the study. This group of educators ensured a viable cross-section of participants. Including educators from a variety of areas gave the researcher

the opportunity to benefit from the diversity of their experiences.

After conducting the focus group, the researcher transcribed and coded the data. Although the researcher invited eight educators to participate in the focus group, only four were able to attend. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identities. The study's findings are best explained by looking at the three primary areas of the TAP professional development model (cluster, incentive-based pay, and evaluation) and by looking at each of the five attributes of a teacher's disposition within those areas.

Cluster

Cluster is another term for a PLC. The details of PLCs may differ at the schools in which TAP has been implemented. For example, teachers at schools using the TAP program are required to meet once a week for at least an hour. Within this requirement, however, teachers in the study were free to choose when they would meet and if they would meet longer or more often. Additionally, each school can choose how to group their teachers for these meetings. The school in this study chose to have PLCs within the school day once each week for 1 hour. Teachers were grouped by grade level, not subject matter, and exploratory teachers met separately as a group. This grouping made meeting within the school day possible for everyone involved.

Empathy. Hannah and Mandy agreed that their empathetic tendencies were enhanced by attending required meetings where they shared and discussed ideas in a nonthreatening environment. Hannah contended that being required to share ideas in a safe and comfortable setting removed much of the tension that could otherwise arise: "We were forced to communicate, it was very non-confrontational, you could get your feelings out there towards other people in a safe environment, and it was all like instructionally based, so it wasn't so personal." Mandy added,

I just felt like we were forced more to have to put up with each other, because we had to put up with each other once a week for that hour. Plus, there were great ideas and good suggestions. We had to implement it, we had to do homework on it, and it was really effective.

Both teachers felt the required meetings yielded positive results.

Positive view of others. Shameka and Mandy felt that cluster led them to see others in a more positive light by helping them realize the commonality of their goal: helping children succeed. Shameka said, “It is awesome to go to cluster and connect with people that you are teaching with, because it did bring all the subjects together.” She appreciated having the opportunity to meet with and share ideas with like-minded professionals. Mandy added that “everyone can work on this (strategy), and with that we were able to focus together.” These meetings gave both participants a more positive view of their coworkers and a greater understanding of how united they were in purpose.

Positive view of self. Two of the participants spoke on how cluster made them more comfortable with their own teaching and helped them grow as professionals.

Shemekka stated,

I think [cluster] definitely made me a better teacher. I don't feel that I am doing as good of a job this year, because I don't have [cluster]. I don't have that support and everything it gives you. I need that as a teacher.

Mandy also said that TAP helped her to be a better teacher:

Through cluster I know how to sit down and write a good lesson plan; and I know that if I delivered that lesson plan, I delivered a good lesson, and that that was what I was supposed to do. And I feel completely confident in that. And that anyone could come in my room at any time, and they would be all over it, and say

“Good Job.”

Knowing her colleagues were counting on her also made Mandy more aware of her own accountability. Cluster also contributed to a sense of community and shared responsibility. Mandy said, “I want to be held accountable, it makes me feel good. Cluster takes pressure off of me to do it myself.”

Mandy and Shameka both felt that cluster helped them gain confidence in themselves as teachers. According to Mandy, “It has given me the confidence to know I can actually do it (teach), whereas I probably didn’t feel like that before, honestly.” Cluster gave confidence through using specific strategies. Using specific strategies and seeing that they help students leads to confidence in the decision making and in the TAP professional development model. Shameka explained,

Cluster gives you confidence, because it is giving you the necessary tools that you need to be successful and I was successful before TAP, but not anywhere near as successful as I became while we were going through the model and so it gave me confidence.

Authenticity. None of the participants made comments relating to cluster having helped increase authenticity within their teacher dispositions.

Meaningful purpose. Three salient ideas emerged from the focus group data on cluster’s impact on the participants. These ideas included the participants’ thoughts on how cluster helped their school to develop a more accurate and inclusive perspective on their community and to understand that perspective’s role in helping students. Hannah stated, “Cluster gave everyone perspective. I’m not an island. It’s not about me. These other people are dealing with these issues, in their subjects and in their classrooms, and it helped us to like get ideas from each other.” James concurred, “I think we are all saying

cluster, the community that it builds in the building, I don't see competition I see cooperation." The school improved its commitment to learning for both the students and the teachers. Hannah talked about the change in school culture:

I like the fact that it created a culture of learning for everybody in our building. Not just students but teachers, and some teachers, as we know, are the worst students; and I think sometimes we get to the point where we feel like we're the master of all knowledge. And I think show—being able to show them that, hey, there is something new out there, there is something you can do better, I think that's a big—that, that's a big thing for me, being able to lead them in that and changing the culture. The thinking of, the learning is all the students, to, a culture of, we're all learning.

These communities, created out of cluster, helped participants realize they were working towards the same goal: the success of the school as exemplified by the success of their students. Mandy stated, "You know, we are all working towards the same goal, we are all on the same team, and we all have the same vision, I think that, that that's necessary for a school to be successful." Hannah expressed the need for all teachers, including those in related arts and special areas, to establish common objectives. Hannah admitted,

I thought related arts classes were not important, but it let me see that one big piece, big "Aha" for me was how much actual classroom standards could be taught in those classes; that it wasn't just a place for the kids to go and be held. It wasn't just art to be art, or PE to be PE. You could actually implement the strategies. You could increase their learning, their reading, their math and everything through those classes.

Cluster was very effective in helping teachers understand the importance of

interdisciplinary cooperation.

Cluster also helped the teachers work towards the common goal of helping their students become more successful. Mandy explained that teachers respond well to clear expectations and strategies. Cluster helped Mandy see her own goals more clearly.

Mandy stated,

Cluster gave me a vision and a focus and if you don't have those things then where are you going? You need goals, you need to know what is expected of you, and you need to know how to meet those goals; and Cluster gave you everything you needed to do that.

The goal of education is to increase each student's achievement, and Shameka felt that cluster helped her reach this goal:

With our goal setting it gave us purpose; and everyone in the building was working toward a common thing. We got specific with it and it (the specific strategy) gave us a chance to develop. Everyone could work on this, and with that, we were able to focus, and we were able to see growth in our students.

Incentive-Based Pay

The TAP professional development model explains incentive-based pay as the equivalent of bonus pay or pay for performance. The higher the scores on standardized testing, in this case the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards, the higher the bonus.

Empathy. One participant believed incentive-based pay helped related arts teachers feel more involved in teaching the core subjects. Integrating core subjects into the related arts classes reinforced the importance of all disciplines. Incentive-based pay helped these teachers know they were making an important contribution to student learning. Shemeka stated,

Related arts teachers do not get the validation that the core teachers get through test scores. Bonus pay for them was really a reward. They're part of the team, and they are getting to see results they don't normally get to see. This was an incentive for them. They really stepped it up. We are learning together and that was pretty incredible and impressive.

By confirming the value of all teaching, incentive pay confirmed the value of all teachers.

Positive view of others. Participants explained how the school community began to function as more of a team. James explained how that team approach was connected to incentive-based pay: "Bonus pay was important, not for me, but I wanted all to get rewarded for doing a good job." Hannah agreed, "I felt like the better everyone does, the more money everyone gets. If you get better, then everyone gets more." Teachers expressed less concern about their own rewards and more about the school's improvement.

Positive view of self. Participants made no comments relating cluster to a growth in positive view of self within their teacher dispositions.

Authenticity. Participants made no comments relating cluster to teachers' cluster helping teachers grow the attribute of authenticity within their teacher dispositions.

Meaningful purpose. When participants addressed incentive-based pay and how it impacted the attribute of meaningful purpose, they explained that the incentive-based pay was just validation of their commitment to the purpose of what they were trying to accomplish with students during that school year. That goal was to increase student achievement. More than the money, the test scores also helped validate the participant's success. Mandy stated, "The majority of people were focused on the end, the test scores. The payout was the test scores, not so much the actual money." However, Shameka

added that the “payout does give some validation.” More than just the money, the teacher’s goal was to increase student achievement which was measured by the PASS standardized test. Hannah added, “Even though students may not be MET, you are increasing your test scores; they are showing growth, and you receive bonus pay for that.”

Evaluation

Empathy. One participant felt that evaluation made a positive difference in her level of empathy. Shameka stated, “Teachers said that evaluation helped them be more sensitive.” She went on to explain that evaluation helped teachers be more attuned to their students’ needs. Teachers were also able to assess their own strengths and weaknesses.

Positive view of others. Three ideas emerged from the participants’ experiences with evaluation and its effect on their positive view of others. Two of those ideas came from one participant, Shameka, who explained that teachers were changing the focus of their teaching: “Teachers said they were more committed to growth and to students’ growth.” Those teachers were also becoming more open to sharing ideas and having observers in their classrooms to see how they were implementing instructional strategies. Shameka stated, “Teachers may say hey, I’m using this in my lesson. Come see what I’m doing.” James expounded on the changes he saw in other teachers, saying, “Teachers really did put forth effort and really wanted to be validated that they were doing a good job.”

Positive view of self. Three participants strongly felt that evaluation helped them to have a more positive view of themselves. James asserted, “Evaluation helped build a teacher’s self-confidence.” Mandy agreed, “It’s not just showing my administrator that

I'm doing what I need to do; but it is to show myself that, yes, I'm doing this every single day and I want to show it off to you when you come in to evaluate me.” Along with the evaluation component, Mandy felt getting feedback on her work enabled her to grow professionally. She explained, “I always got suggestions from the person that evaluated, not just a ‘good job’ comment. It was feedback that I could make it better for next time. It was actual feedback with suggestions and ideas.” Many teachers get nervous when evaluated. Shameka knew, however, that being assessed fairly and honestly would ultimately increase her level of confidence in her work. Shameka stated, “I felt better about myself during TAP implementation than any other time I was evaluated.” The TAP evaluation instrument was effective in increasing teachers’ pride in their jobs.

Authenticity. No comments were made regarding cluster’s effect on authenticity.

Meaningful purpose. Evaluation did have an appreciable impact on participants’ attributes of meaningful purpose. James explained, “People did see value in evaluation—it wasn’t something just to harass people; it was actually beneficial.” Evaluation was beneficial in helping teachers reach the school’s goals. Hannah explained, “Evaluation was never meant to be a way to ‘get’ teachers; it was to make everyone better, because our goal was to increase student achievement.” Evaluation helped teachers to realize that working hard would pay dividends to them and their students. Shameka stated, “Evaluation held teachers to see their potential growth.” Evaluation also helped teachers to develop better lesson plans and to see the results in their own students’ achievements. Mandy stated,

Teachers knew that they were being evaluated, so it made you focus your lessons on those things, like getting all students involved, making sure all students actually understood what you taught that day by doing the assessment at the end

of each class.

Summary of Focus Group Data

The researcher focused on the areas of cluster, incentive-based pay, and evaluation. During the group discussions, several important points emerged. While all group members agreed that they appreciated bonus pay, none of them counted it as a significant part of their decisions. Participants agreed, on the other hand, that cluster and evaluation were strong factors in helping them make good decisions. Cluster was especially instrumental to their instruction for several reasons: it provided tools and ideas, it sharpened instructional focus, and it created a community atmosphere. The focus group members stated that bonus pay was nice but did not make an impact in their professional decision-making process. Members of the focus group consistently stated that cluster and evaluation made an impact on their professional decision-making processes. The areas impacted the most were cluster and evaluation. The focus group members consistently stated that cluster helped them be better teachers by providing tools and ideas to use in their classrooms, helped the participants have an instructional focus, and created a team atmosphere within the school. The focus group members consistently stated that evaluation helped them be more reflective, gave purpose to their group discussions, and helped them focus on student achievement.

Table 9 shows the number of times each of the attributes were mentioned during the focus group.

Table 9

Attribute Frequency

Theme	N
Authenticity	0
Empathy	1
Positive View of Others	2
Positive View of Self	5
Meaningful Purpose	7

Findings of Interviews Connected to Disposition Attributes

The researcher used Seidman's (1998) semi-structured three-series interview process to conduct interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The first interview focused on the two participants' personal and professional backgrounds. The second interview focused on the implementation of the SCTAP professional development model in the areas of evaluation and incentive pay and their impact on the participants' dispositions. The third interview focused on cluster and its impact, if any, on the participants' dispositions.

The participants for the interviews were also participants in the focus group. At the conclusion of the focus group, the researcher explained the interview process and asked which participants would be willing to complete the process. These two participants were the first to express an interest in completing the interviews with the researcher. The interviews were transcribed and coded by the researcher. Pseudonyms were used for each of the participants.

Interview-Participant One (Shameka)

The interview with the first participant brought out three themes. Shameka

summed up the first of these ideas as it applied to her own job performance:

Cluster helped me to focus even more. When I say “focus,” I mean really zero-in on things that I needed to look at, change, participate in, do within my classroom; things that I didn’t even know existed sometimes, until we went through a PD, and it was introduced, and the light bulb went off in my head, “I can do that!”

When you focus on the needs of the students and focus on getting strategies to help those students, this helps you know the purpose of what you are doing inside your classroom.

Shameka also felt that having a purpose helps teachers with their personal and professional growth. As she explained, “Cluster makes me think, reflect about what I’m doing. When you are focused, and everything has a reason behind it, a purpose behind it, that’s only going to make you better professionally, and personally.” When students see value in what they are learning, they are more likely to be engaged and cooperative. Shameka said, “If I do something in my classroom I want it to have meaning behind it. I want it to have purpose. If I do something in my room I want it to be beneficial for my students and for myself.”

Shameka also felt cluster gave her innovative ideas and tools to use in her classroom:

I think before TAP, I seemed to just kind of do my own thing, more of a lecture, have them follow along; not so many activities, where they were getting involved.

TAP gave me the ideas and the tools that I needed in order to get them more involved.

She felt that TAP gave her the right tools to meet her students’ needs. “Cluster gave us tools and ideas that we needed.” Having the appropriate instructional tools helped

Shameka feel more confident in her teaching. In cluster, she felt free to discuss her ideas openly and honestly and listen to others' ideas as well. She explained,

I enjoyed the professional development model part of TAP because I felt like it gave me the tools necessary to be a successful teacher. I felt like having a weekly PD was extremely helpful to me, and being with my peers, the people that I teach with every day, being able to bounce ideas off of them, get ideas, tweak the ideas that I was getting and be able to use it in my classroom. I felt like I was a very successful teacher when I used that model.

Shameka also felt that cluster led her to want to be a better teacher, one who was more committed to her profession. She stated, "Cluster led me to want to do the best job that I can do and cluster definitely lends itself to making you more committed as teacher, if you want to grow professionally and personally as teacher." She went further to explain the positive effects of TAP on her teaching: "I think I was a good teacher before TAP; I think I was a much better teacher after TAP, because of the things like cluster."

Incentive-based pay. Shameka said little about incentive-based pay during the interview, not believing it to be essential to success. According to Shameka, "The bonus was nice but it was just that, a bonus. Just pure bonus, and who doesn't like a bonus, but that is all it was. It was never about the money for me." When she saw the data, she observed, "I am surprised that bonus pay was so low in the survey. I'm glad to know that the money was not driving people." Shameka was glad to realize that teachers were not only working for the incentive pay; instead, they were working hard not to benefit themselves but to better the lives of their students.

Evaluation. Shameka believed both cluster and evaluation complemented each other in their positive effects on teachers. Cluster helped teachers to learn new and

different classroom strategies; evaluation enabled them to know the extent of their growth and validated what they were learning in cluster. Shameka stated, “Evaluation and cluster went hand-in-hand for me. One without the other would not be as effective.” Using what she learned in cluster and being evaluated on what she learned helped Shameka improve student achievement. She explained,

The evaluation gave purpose to cluster. Tell me what you did that was good, tell me what you did see that I need to work on. I want to know because ultimately I want to see those kids move from one area to another, from NOT MET ONE to NOT MET TWO.

Having access to the evaluation component also helped Shameka be more reflective about her teaching and her students’ growth: “The evaluation helped me especially when I had to reflect on my lesson, and the evaluation definitely made me take an honest look at myself, which I think we need to do.” Shameka also realized the results of the evaluation were a direct reflection of her work in the classroom.

[The evaluation] is a reflection on my school, it’s a reflection on my subject matter, and it’s a reflection on my students. I want to see growth, I want them to be successful in the next 4 years, and I want them to be successful now.

Shameka’s ultimate goal as an educator is making an impact on what and how her students are learning. Shameka stated, “What I learned in cluster I implemented in my classroom, and when I was evaluated I wanted to know that it’s making an impact on my students, that I am doing it the right way.”

Interview-Participant Two (Hannah)

Cluster. Hannah was interviewed about how cluster affected the attribute of meaningful purpose. Hannah explained how she and other teachers reacted to cluster:

The majority of them liked cluster. I think some of them went into it hesitantly at first. Once they learned it was not a threatening atmosphere, then they grew to like The seventh-grade team, they embraced it. Eighth grade as well. I think it was a little bit harder for exploratory, even though they tried to. Of course, sixth grade was the most reluctant. For the most part, what I saw, from the data we collected, from test scores, from conversations, they enjoyed that time (in cluster). They benefited from that time. They did find purpose.

Teachers in cluster received classroom strategies to use which matched the data gathered by the leadership team. Hannah stated,

I think when you go to cluster, and you're given a tool, you're shown a tool, whatever it may be. We chose vocabulary development that year. The teachers take it back to their classroom, and they had to implement in within their classroom.

She added that she felt all teachers should have the desire to learn and train to be better at their jobs. She explained, "We meet as a group, teach the tools, use what they've been taught. It's nothing different; we're still learners. It's nothing different than learning on the job. It's on-the-job training."

Hannah felt cluster gave teachers a way to be more reflective about their teaching. When teachers have the time to think about the success or failure of classroom strategies, they can make improvements of changes before using them again. Hannah explained,

I think the reflective piece comes in after they've used it in the classroom. Did it help or not? I think because they knew they were coming back the next week, they had to be somewhat reflective, but also they realized, "Hey, this really can help me." Just from conversations I've had with teachers, I think the reflective

part is something that teachers don't always have the time to do. They're in there, and their lessons are going and the next day's coming, and the next class is coming. With this, they were almost, in a way, forced to do it, but it was a good thing. I think they agreed with that part of it. They felt like they needed that reflective piece.

The idea of environment was a theme that emerged within the interview process. Hannah explained that cluster helped the staff develop collegiality, learn in a safe environment, and discover how to employ teamwork for the betterment of their students. Shameka explained how cluster increased collegiality within the faculty:

By bringing teachers together in cluster, you gave them . . . you built collegiality. Even though it was different subjects, they had to sit down and have those conversations, and they had to get specific and look at individual students. As a team, they could focus on the needs of those students, whatever they may be, mental, physical, spiritual, whatever.

Hannah added that cluster was a safe environment where teachers could share with one another without fear.

It was a safe environment for you to throw out an idea and then to hash it out. How is this going to work? How is this going to look like in your math classroom? What is this going to look like in your science classroom? I think it definitely, as we mentioned before, developed that collegiality across grade levels, and it helped them to be able to share ideas where they're normally one person teaching that one subject.

Teachers were also able to connect with teachers in other classrooms and know that they were united in reaching their goals. "Cluster allowed them to see that there is a

connection across subjects. They are not on an island.”

Although most of Hannah’s comments were positive, she did point out why some teachers might have been hesitant about attending cluster. Some teachers were concerned that they would be expected to replicate the strategy in exact detail in their classrooms.

Hannah stated,

Some people, they felt like they had to use what we were going over in cluster, what we were doing with TAP. They had to use that, and maybe that squelched a little bit of their Maybe they wouldn’t have done it that way, but that was the way we were taught in cluster. I still think there were some that took what was given to them in cluster, added their own spin to it, and made it work in their classroom.

Incentive-based pay. Hannah felt that incentive pay’s impact in her school was minimal as teachers did not view money as a significant motivator. Hannah tended, “I don’t think that is what they were working for. I think that it was just an added bonus. I don’t think that it necessarily affected their professional decision-making process.” She said teachers did appreciate the perk of bonus pay, but that it was not the main focus of their jobs. Teachers worked hard out of pride and dedication to their students. She clarified her comments,

I just believe that the teachers were there to teach and bonus pay was just an added perk. There really wasn’t a lot of discussion about it. Some teachers just didn’t know how to respond and felt like why am I getting check? I just did my job.

Evaluation. The researcher used the interviews to elicit clear responses to questions about evaluation and meaningful purpose. Hannah felt, “The evaluation made

us be more committed to the growth of all learners.” This student progress was the school’s goal and she felt evaluation reinforced the teachers’ levels of commitment. She explained as well that evaluation allowed teachers to determine if their strategies were successful. Teachers received feedback through evaluation on how to improve their teaching. Hannah explained,

[Teachers] could see where they were doing things right, or they could see where they were doing things wrong. From evaluation to evaluation, they could see where they had improved from where they were the time before, maybe. I think with that They had to take that evaluation, they had to be somewhat reflective on it, and they had to look at what they were doing and see how they were going to change things, how they were going to improve or how they were going to continue to do what they were doing in order to show the growth of their learners.

Hannah referred to another teacher’s response to evaluation:

I’ll use Emily for instance. Following an evaluation and a coaching situation with her, she was hungry for suggestions. She wanted to know, “What can I do?” From the first evaluation to her last evaluation, you could see tremendous growth there.

Evaluation also motivated teachers when they became frustrated and wondered if their strategies were working. Hannah explained how evaluation validated their efforts:

Evaluation let them see what they were doing, or helped validate what they were doing in the classroom. Their mission was to teach the students. The evaluation said, “I am assessing the right way. I am questioning the right way. I’m using the strategies from cluster. My classroom’s arranged.” It gave them some feedback

on their mission, on whether or not they were making strides towards that. The teachers were able to see, “Hey, I am working towards my mission. I may not be there yet, but I am working towards that ‘A’ in the classroom, but right now I need to work on these things, or I’ve got this piece, and now I need to work on this piece.”

Summary of Interview Findings

The interviews were centered on the area of meaningful purpose because the data from the surveys and the focus group indicated that meaningful purpose was impacted more than any other attribute of a teacher’s disposition. Cluster gave teachers meaningful purpose by providing tools for instruction, growing collegiality through professional development, and giving focus through establishing common goals. Cluster gave teachers a purpose and allowed them to be more reflective about their work. Interviewees stated that cluster allowed them to work across the curriculum instead of in isolation, to bounce ideas off each other, and to give meaning to their professional development and its connection to student achievement.

Bonus pay seemed to have little on interviewees’ sense of meaningful purpose. Their comments were consistent with those from the survey and the focus group; while bonus pay was a perk, it had no real impact on their professional decision making. Evaluation, a possible tool to intimidate and punish teachers, became a means of genuine encouragement. By giving teachers the opportunity to reflect on their instructional strategies, evaluation enabled teachers to work on improving their skills without fear.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The importance of accountability as a component of education reform has steadily increased over the last 4 decades. The National Commission on Excellence in Education's (1983) report made its case for an education overhaul: "In a world of ever-accelerating competition and change in the conditions of the workplace, of ever-greater danger, and of ever-larger opportunities for those prepared to meet them, educational reform should focus on the goal of creating a Learning Society" (p. 14). One of the most ambitious reform efforts was NCLB. To fulfill NCLB's mission, all states put standards into place and held schools accountable for meeting them. Despite its sweeping agenda, NCLB did little, if anything, to improve education. According to Schneider, "Despite more than a decade of intensive efforts at school reform, families, teachers, and policymakers continue to demand more effective strategies to improve the academic productivity of American schools" (Coleman et al., 1997, p. 1).

A more localized reform effort is the SCTAP, which includes three significant aspects of reform: teacher incentive pay, PLCs, and teacher evaluation. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact of the SCTAP (South Carolina Department of Education, 2013) on middle-level teachers' dispositions. Knowing how the professional development model impacted a teacher's disposition offered insight into which parts of the model were most effective in bringing about change.

This chapter provides a summary of the findings drawn from the research question. These findings provide a basis for putting strategies into practice. The final part of this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

Research Question

Student achievement, the primary focus of education, is also the focus of the SCTAP development program. Research has suggested professional development does not lead to change in instruction unless the professional development is consistent and ongoing. The SCTAP model is both. SCTAP schools work toward one goal per year. This goal is created based on information gathered from several data sources. Once the goal is created, the professional development is created around it, and the faculty works on the goal weekly. The school's progress toward meeting the goal is monitored throughout the year.

Additional research suggests that if teachers are able to change and improve their dispositions about teaching, or if teachers inherently possess positive dispositions about teaching, they are more apt to be successful. This study looked at five specific teacher dispositions as described by Usher et al. (2003). The researcher's hope was that studying these five dispositions through the SCTAP model would provide evidence of a change in teacher dispositions, resulting in a corresponding increase in student achievement. Knowing the impact of this change offered valuable insight into which parts of the professional development model most affected changes in a teacher's disposition.

The following research question guided this study: To what extent does the SCTAP professional development model impact teacher disposition within the following: Empathy, Positive View of Others, Positive View of Self, Authenticity, and Meaningful Purpose?

Problem

Schneider said, "Despite more than a decade of intensive efforts at school reform, families, teachers, and policymakers continue to demand more effective strategies to

improve the academic productivity of American schools” (Coleman et al., 1997, p. 1). Dewey’s statements imply that children respond directly to the dispositions and attitudes of the teacher; therefore, it is necessary to determine which dispositions, attitudes, or habits of mind are best for the students involved in the education process (Richardson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). As Perkins argued, dispositions towards certain kinds of thinking are also crucially important and can be developed through practice, reflection, encouragement, and direction (Bentley, 1998). Therefore, the impact of professional development on teacher disposition needs to be further researched.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the impact, if any, the SCTAP professional development model had on middle-level teacher dispositions. SCTAP is a reform effort encompassing many other reform efforts, including teacher incentive pay, PLCs, and teacher evaluation. This study was designed specifically to investigate the impact of SCTAP components, including cluster meetings, value-added incentive pay, and teacher evaluation on middle-level teacher dispositions. Dispositions can be defined as the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence teacher behavior toward students, families, colleagues, and communities, ultimately affecting student learning, motivation, and development as well as the educator’s own professional growth (Mitchell, 2000). To foster more effective teaching, leaders must examine teacher dispositions and determine their role in the students’ overall experiences. This research is important because effective teacher dispositions, combined with teacher knowledge, may prove to be the answer in improving student achievement. As Singh and Stoloff (2008) explained, teacher dispositions play as critical a role in teacher quality and effectiveness as do pedagogical and content knowledge and skills.

Review of Methodology

This study was an exploratory case study of one middle school in South Carolina. This school was chosen because it implemented the SCTAP professional development model and received the high rating, level 5, from SCTAP 2 years in a row. The researcher used a 30-question survey, one focus group, and six interviews to collect data. The data were analyzed individually to specifically look at the three areas of the SCTAP professional development model (cluster, incentive pay, and evaluation) and how they impacted certain attributes of a teacher's disposition. The data were also analyzed to see which of these areas had the greatest impact on a teacher's disposition and which attribute of a disposition these areas impacted. After reviewing and coding the data, the researcher was able to identify which attributes of teachers' dispositions were impacted by the SCTAP professional development model and how these dispositions helped the school attain the highest SCTAP rating, level 5, for 2 consecutive years.

Major Findings

Cluster's impact on meaningful purpose was significant; the discussions teachers had with each other encouraged them to commit even more to their students' academic achievement. By sharing strategies, teachers increased their own base of knowledge, which they in turn imparted to their students. Cluster's professional development was focused on meeting the needs of all students within the school. The school leadership team made data-based decisions on which strategies would be most beneficial to students. Teachers in all areas attended professional development meetings each week. In these meetings, teachers would not only learn new strategies but also how to implement them correctly. These discussions were valuable in helping teachers acquire a wider base of knowledge for use in the classroom.

Evaluation also had an impact on meaningful purpose by giving teachers the chance to reflect on their job performances and decide on the best ways to make improvements if needed. When teachers were observed and evaluated, they received feedback on the strategies' effectiveness. Following an evaluation, teacher and observer met to go over the results. The observer discussed one positive area, one area in need of reinforcement, and one area in need of improvement or refinement. In discussing the need for refinement, teachers felt free to be reflective about their own teaching and how to make improvements.

Findings Related to Literature

Cluster (PLC) allowed teachers to commit to the growth of all learners. As explained by Schmoker (1999), "People accomplish more together than in isolation; regular, collective dialogue about an agreed upon focus sustains commitment and feeds purpose; effort thrives on concrete evidence of progress and teachers learn best from other teachers" (p. 55). The school had a shared purpose of improving student achievement, and the school staff was committed to this purpose.

Cluster also allowed teachers to intensify their knowledge. Teachers attended cluster to learn strategies that would help improve student achievement. Waddell and Lee (2008) explained that in their study the school created a culture of inquiry and commitment to reaching all of their students' needs. The staff was committed to reflection, research, and most of all to their own professional growth. Another study by Hughes and Kritsonis (2007) looked at a high school and the effects of PLCs on student achievement. They found those effects to be positive. Teachers profited from being able to learn from other professionals and to pass their knowledge on to their students. Huffman and Hipp (2003) described a PLC as,

When professionals, school wide, come together frequently and regularly to reflect on their practice, to assess their effectiveness, to collectively study in a social context what they consider to be areas in need of attention, and to make decisions about what they need to learn to become more effective. (p. vii)

Schmoker (1999) also stated that in order to improve student learning even more, an effective team must have follow-up or a concise discussion about what has and has not worked in the classroom.

Evaluation helped teachers to be more honest about their strengths and weaknesses. This honest assessment of their own work led them to become better teachers who welcomed the chance to improve their skills. Stronge and Hindman's (2003) research noted that effective teachers "exhibit caring and fairness; have a positive attitude about life and teaching; are reflective thinkers about their craft and have high expectations for themselves and their students" (p. 51).

Limitations

As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011), no research study is perfect. Researchers gather data to inform their audience about specific topics, but certain necessary constraints can impose limitations on the quality and amount of information. An understanding of how a study is limited is necessary to help readers know the extent of its usefulness to them. This study's purpose was to determine if specific attributes of a teacher's disposition were impacted through three areas of the SCTAP professional development model: cluster, incentive-based pay, and evaluation.

The study was framed by attributes of a Teacher's Disposition from Usher et al. (2003). Usher et al. took the five beliefs of helpers from Combs (1999), reformulated them into dispositions of effective teachers, and used them as they continued their

research on teacher dispositions. This research and its findings about the attributes of a teacher's disposition are seen through this lens of Usher et al.'s research.

Delimitations

This study was conducted in South Carolina, in one school district, and in one middle school. This narrow focus was deliberate so the researcher could have a deeper understanding of the phenomena. As suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011), "One chooses a qualitative approach to understand the phenomena . . . in depth and in context" (p. 77). A teacher's disposition is very complex; because of this complexity, the study does not provide a prescriptive approach to discovering which area of professional development model will most positively impact a teacher's disposition. This study offers only suggestions of what parts of a professional development model will positively impact the five attributes of a teacher's disposition.

Future Research/Surprises

Because this study focused on only five attributes of a teacher's disposition, studying more attributes will clarify the findings further. This study researched only one professional development model and three specific areas of that model: cluster, incentive-based pay, and evaluation. Researching other professional development models with different components could lead to different conclusions.

While collecting data, several of the participants brought up the idea of student involvement in the process. Further research on what students view as important and effective could offer a valuable perspective on teacher dispositions. A researcher would then be able to compare what attributes teachers said were impacted with what attributes their students thought were impacted.

This study focused on the positive impact the three areas of the SCTAP

professional development model had on teacher dispositions as defined by Usher et al. (2003). Future research on professional development models and any negative impact on teacher dispositions would allow researchers to understand what parts negatively impact their teachers and to decide whether to use or not to use those models.

After conducting the focus group and interviews and analyzing the data, the researcher was surprised by two ideas which emerged from the data. The first of these was the idea of leadership. Although there were no questions in the focus group or in the interviews which directly related to leadership, participants did make the statement that how leadership implemented these professional development models was another part of school success within those models.

The second idea was that of validation. Participants in the focus group and interview process felt that all three of the areas of the SCTAP professional model validated the job they were completing within their classrooms. For example, Shameka went to cluster and took back ideas and strategies to use in her classroom. When observers came in to evaluate her and she did well in an area, her work was validated by her use of what she had learned in cluster. Hannah added that the incentive-based pay was a validation of the job teachers were doing in the classroom. Teachers did not have to have the money but getting it did give credibility to what they were doing in class.

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Appendix A
Survey Protocol

Survey Protocol

Empathy

Positive View of Others

Positive View of Self

Authenticity

Meaningful Purpose

Cluster

1. Cluster helped me see and accept other's points of view in using specific instructional strategies.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

2. Cluster helped me to be more sensitive to the learner's background knowledge.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

3. Teacher bonuses helped me see and accept other's points of view in using specific instructional strategies.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

4. Teacher bonuses helped me to be more sensitive to the learner's background knowledge.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

5. Evaluation helped me see and accept other's points of view in using specific instructional strategies.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

6. Evaluation helped me to be more sensitive to the learner's background knowledge.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

7. Cluster helped me believe in my peer's ability and their potential in teaching.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

8. Cluster helped me honor the internal dignity and integrity of each learner and hold positive expectations for his or her behavior.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

9. Teacher bonuses helped me believe in my peer's ability and their potential in teaching.
 - a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neutral
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

10. Teacher bonuses helped me honor the internal dignity and integrity of each learner and hold positive expectations for his or her behavior.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

11. Evaluation helped me believe in my peer's ability and their potential in teaching.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

12. Evaluation helped me honor the internal dignity and integrity of each learner and hold positive expectations for his or her behavior.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

13. Cluster helped increase my self-confidence in my own teaching ability.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

14. Cluster helped me see myself with a positive, abiding and trustworthy sense of actual and potential worth, ability and capacity for growth.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

15. Teacher bonuses increased my self-confidence in my own teaching ability.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

16. Teacher Bonuses helped me see myself with a positive, abiding and trustworthy sense of actual and potential worth, ability and capacity for growth.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

17. Evaluation increased my self-confidence in my own teaching ability.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

18. Evaluation helped me see myself with a positive, abiding and trustworthy sense of actual and potential worth, ability and capacity for growth.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

19. Cluster gave me a sense of freedom and openness that enabled me to be honest and allowed me to share both personally and professionally.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

20. Cluster helped me see the importance of openness, self-disclosure and being a “real” person and teacher.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

21. Bonus pay gave me a sense of freedom and openness that enabled me to be honest and allowed me to share both personally and professionally.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

22. Bonus pay helped me see the importance of openness, self-disclosure and being a “real” person and teacher.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

23. Evaluation gave me a sense of freedom and openness that enabled me to be honest and allowed me to share both personally and professionally.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

24. Evaluation helped me see the importance of openness, self-disclosure and being a “real” person and teacher.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree

- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

25. Cluster helped me be more reflective about my teaching and the purpose behind my professional decision making process.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

26. Cluster helped me to be committed to growth of all learners in mental, physical and spiritual realms through a sense of “mission” in education.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

27. Bonus pay helped me be more reflective about my teaching and the purpose behind my professional decision making process.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

28. Bonus pay helped me to be committed to growth of all learners in mental, physical and spiritual realms through a sense of “mission” in education.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

29. Evaluation helped me be more reflective about my teaching and the purpose behind my professional decision making process.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree

- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

30. Evaluation helped me to be committed to growth of all learners in mental, physical and spiritual realms through a sense of “mission” in education.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Neutral
- d. Disagree
- e. Strongly Disagree

Comments:

Appendix B

Letter of Approval for Survey Questions

To whom it may concern,

In the year 2011-2012, I completed my dissertation titled, Analyzing the South Carolina Teacher Advancement Program's Effectiveness and Its Impact on Teacher's Professional Growth. The dissertation was a mixed methods study that involved four research questions that focused on the components of TAP. The four areas of focus included embedded professional development, teacher effectiveness, teacher collaboration and performance pay. Each of the areas served as a way to answer how TAP had an impact on professional growth and teacher efficacy among teachers. The survey questions that researcher and doctoral candidate, Andrew Hooker has included with his research closely align with the questions I developed for my research. The questions have been broken down to include the vital components of TAP which include embedded professional development or cluster, performance pay and evaluation. The questions are valid and will serve as a true and effective way to measure the research questions that was developed for this study.

Allen Fain, Ed.D.

Appendix C
Focus Group Protocol

Focus Group Protocol

Welcome

Introductions

Explain to participants the process of the dissertation, the dissertations goal, and what will be done with the data collected.

Our topic is ...

The results of this focus group will be used for my dissertation data.

You were selected because you were part of Dacusville Middle Schools faculty during TAP implementation

So far I have completed surveys with the faculty

Guidelines

No right or wrong answers, only differing points of view

We're tape recording; please one person speaking at a time

We're on a first name basis

You don't need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views

I ask that you turn off your phones

My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion

Beginning/Tentative Probes

Please tell me your name, your position and responsibilities at Dacusville Middle School during TAP implementation.

Talk to me a little about TAP.

After the survey was given, the survey found specific things. How do you feel about that?

Talk to me about that.

Appendix D
Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Welcome

Introductions

Explain to participant the process of the dissertation, the dissertations goal and what will be done with the data collected.

Our topic is ...TAP and teacher dispositions

The results of this interview will be used for my dissertation data.

You were selected because you were part of Dacusville Middle School's faculty during TAP implementation

So far I have completed surveys and one focus group

Guidelines

No right or wrong answers, only your point of view

We're tape recording; I will have you read the transcription when it is completed to make sure you agree with what was recorded

We're on a first name basis

I ask that you turn off your phone

My role as researcher will be to guide the discussion

Beginning/Tentative Probes

Tell me a little bit about yourself.

How did you come to be here?

Talk to me a little about TAP and your experience with the professional development model.

When the survey was completed, this is what the data said. How do you feel about that?

This is what was mentioned in the focus group. How do you feel about that?