DIALOGUE IN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF DIALOGUE AND SHARED VISION

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By
Catherine Neumann-Boxer

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ABSTRACT

The use of dialogue is theoretically proposed in educational literature and in documents produced by school divisions (Bohm, 1996; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008; Shields & Edwards, 2005; Wheatley, 1999; Senge, 1990). Dialogical communication is increasingly being encouraged in response to the diversity and complexity of today's school populations (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Shields & Edwards, 2005). Dialogue is the suggested mode of communication for constructivist practices in schools. Lacking in the literature is evidence from the field on how dialogue actually works in schools to enhance constructivist ways of doing to produce shared vision.

This exploratory study was an investigation into PLC members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision. Instrumental case study was used to gather members' understandings. Data were collected from members of two separate professional learning communities using observations, focus groups, and interviews. A thematic analysis of the data revealed that along with what is already known about dialogue are five catalytic components participants used to create and sustain dialogic communication: (a) Building shared vision requires dialogue to meld perspectives and acknowledge group member emergent roles, (b) Dialogue provides access to others' ideas; enhancing learning through developing broad perspectives and modifying thinking, (c) Mindsets enhancing dialogue are: desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency; keen attention to what others need; a desire to function as professionals; and ownership over practice, (d) Two conditions enhancing dialogue are: systemic support and measurable outcomes, and (e) A highly developed commitment to students enhances dialogical communication in schools.

The study's findings add to existing theory and provide implications for policy and practice. Policy makers, leaders, and educators wishing to enhance dialogical communication in schools need to employ, and provide opportunity for others to employ, these catalytic components deliberately and explicitly. Deliberate and explicit use of these five components would aid in enhancing dialogic communication in schools.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROBLEM

The changing, increasingly complex, and diverse climate of education has prompted people to rethink the assumptions they use to formulate ways of doing in educational organizations (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Shields & Edwards, 2005). Ways of doing (actions taken) are a synthesis and an articulation of the philosophical assumptions held by people (Martin, 2003, p. 11). A holistic, collective, collaborative way of doing is proposed as a way in which educators can respond to the changing climate and provide students with what they need in the 21st century (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Shields & Edwards, 2005). The concept of dialogue is at the heart of these arguments. The term dialogue appears in growing number of government, education, organization, and leadership literature (Schein, 2003).

Schein (2003) suggested that complex situations in the world today require dialogue. He stated that dialogue is needed in order to deal with contemporary complex issues, such as social and corporate decision making, getting control of the deficit or health care costs, and labor-management relations. At the root of these issues, he suggested, is a problem with the way in which people communicate with and understand one another which prevents people from working well together. "We are likely to find communication failures and cultural misunderstandings that prevent parties from framing the problem in a common way, and thus make it impossible to deal with the problem constructively" (p. 40).

Dialogue is defined as a special kind of communication, differing from other forms of communication because in dialogue space is made for multiple parts/

perspectives to form holistic, shared understanding (Bohm, 1996; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Senge, 1990; Stewart, et al., 2004). In dialogical communications, components of dialogue (as discussed in Chapter 2), such as intentionality, tensionality, listening, and suspension of judgment are used collectively to formulate shared understanding. The shared understanding created through dialogue enhances the ability of people to work well together, because the deliberate use of dialogue and its components ensures multiple perspective shared constructions of understanding (Bohm, 1996). Dialogue allows for multiple perspectives to be incorporated into ways of doing in schools. Ways of doing in schools is delimited, for the purposes of this study, to educators (including leaders) working together to serve students well.

Dialogue to enhance ways of doing in schools is theoretically used in educational literature and in documents produced by school divisions (Bohm, 1996; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008; Shields & Edwards, 2005; Wheatley, 1999; Senge, 1990). Dialogue is the suggested mode of communication for collaborative practices in schools. Dialogue is theoretically proposed as being a holistic, coherent, collective, conscious, and deliberate communicative action, with the purpose of building understanding, shared vision, solving problems, and resolving conflict.

Dialogical constructivist ways of doing are increasingly being encouraged in response to the diversity and complexity of school populations (Shields & Edwards, 2005). Dialogue has also been proposed as a way in which to proactively build capacity among educators and leaders to enhance constructivist ways of doing in schools (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Senge, 1990; Shields & Edwards, 2005).

1.1 Context

In current organizational literature there is an increased emphasis on a shift of perception from mechanistic to holistic paradigmatic ways of doing. The literature is increasingly focused on holism through the use of dialogue to build shared vision (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Senge, 1990; Shields & Edwards, 2005). Rather than operating organizations from mechanistic philosophical assumptions, which involves isolating parts of the whole and using only one or two perspectives as a basis for ways of doing in organizations, people are becoming more concerned with "a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes" (Senge, 1990, p. 69) and accessing multiple perspectives in order to inform ways of doing. Recently, philosophical assumptions guiding the way in which we understand the world have evolved (Shields & Edwards, 2005). Scientists, philosophers, and educators are now placing increased emphasis on relationships between parts and how these relationships affect the functioning of the whole. Dialogue is theoretically proposed in new science (Wheatley, 1999), systems thinking (Senge, 1990), and a new educational order (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001) as a way in which to broaden traditional thought that rests on mechanistic philosophies. Shifts in perception and ways of doing in schools are creating room for alternate, adaptable, and creative thought needed in a complex and changing world.

According to Schein (2003) it may be leaders in schools that are most reluctant to make this shift and engage in dialogue:

> For leaders to reveal to others (and even to themselves) that they are not sure of themselves, that they do not understand all of the assumptions on which they base action, and that they make mistakes in their thinking can be profoundly threatening (p. 50).

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The use of dialogue among teachers and leaders, however, is proposed as an essential form of communication based in holistic philosophical assumptions informed by the multiple perspectives inherent in today's schools. Communications and ways of doing in schools tend to be influenced by and revolve around the idea that there is one best way of doing education (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). This is not the case, in fact there are many ways of doing and using dialogue to access these many ways and incorporating aspects into ways of doing in schools, serves students more appropriately (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Shields & Edwards, 2005). Through dialogue the notion that there is one best way to do education gives way to alternate, more appropriate ways of doing education. Dialogue can assist leaders and educators to see beyond one best way of doing education, by building shared vision to appropriately attend to what students need in a new and complex world.

The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education recommends that leaders in schools use dialogue to promote constructivist ways of doing in schools, including building shared vision (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008). Ministry documents have been published for the purpose of fostering "constructive dialogue within divisions, and school communities, and between the Ministry of Education and school divisions in the pursuit of improved outcomes for all students" (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 2). The recent accountability shift through the introduction of the Continuous Improvement Framework (CIF) (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008), brings with it a mandate that all Saskatchewan school divisions report student learning goals and outcomes to the province through a Continuous Improvement Report. Part of the recommended procedures for developing these goals in schools is the use of dialogue to

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build shared visions within professional learning communities (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008).

The CIF extends from the Effective Practices Framework (EPF) (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008), developed to provide students with an "education system relevant to the interests and aspirations of today's children and youth [and] responsive to the changing needs of Saskatchewan's students, families, and communities" (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004, p. 1). Both documents highlight the use of dialogue in educators' communications about ways of doing in schools that support new, diverse and complex student needs in a changing world.

It is apparent that a fundamental aspect in the CIF is a philosophical assumption that collective, collaborative, dialogic processes to produce shared understanding are fundamental aspects of effective functioning of schools. People engaged in these "collaborative relationships see themselves as mutually supportive partners working together" engaging in "collective reflection, dialogue and shared work" (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004, p. 14).

Included in the CIF guide is a rubric, based on a vast body of professional and scholarly literature, for measurement of many school attributes, one of these being the development of vision. The rubric was developed from the Effective Practices Framework (Saskatchewan Learning, 2004). The EPF rubric involves three stages in the process of developing and actualizing shared vision in schools. The first phase is the Planning Stage, labeled Constructing Connections. In this phase educators participate in developing a shared vision of what they want to accomplish together. The second phase is the Progressing Stage, labeled Commitment. In this phase the "learning community

members accept responsibility for advancing the shared vision" (p. 38). The Actualizing Stage, labeled Synergy, is the third phase. In this phase educators focus on actualizing the shared vision—"learning community members are engaged in identifying local strengths, needs, and collaboratively work toward their shared vision" (p. 38). Succession through the stages and measurement of attainment of shared vision at the actualizing stage includes "ongoing dialogue [that] engage[s] a broad range of school and community members who form the dynamic learning community" (p. 38). Succession through these stages and the actualization of shared vision requires dialogue from multiple perspectives.

1.2 Shared Vision and Dialogue

It is proposed that educators use dialogue to build shared vision. According to Deetz and Simpson (2004) the use of dialogue aids in bringing different philosophical assumptions to light and provides people with the ability to communicate with and incorporate these differences to "mutually construct understanding" (p. 145). Mutually constructed understanding, built from multiple perspectives through dialogue, contributes to shared vision needed to fulfill the duty leaders and teachers have to provide students with an education that addresses and prepares people for new and complex social conditions.

Although dialogue is theoretically proposed as a process to enhance ways of working together, a process for using dialogue has not been developed to aid educators to fulfill the expectation. Dialogue has not been studied in an organizational context to learn how dialogue works in practice to enhance collaborative ways of doing in educational organizations. Exploring educators' understandings of dialogue in practice

may provide educators with insight into how dialogue works in practice to aid educators to meet expectations set by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.

1.3 Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to explore and conceptualize professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue. The study was conducted as a qualitative instrumental case study. I gathered educators' stories and understandings through observations, focus groups, and interviews. Key understandings about shared vision and dialogue were identified from participants' stories using coding and constant comparison (Charmaz, 2005).

1.4 Research Question

What are professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision in schools?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Dialogue is often theoretically proposed in the literature to enhance ability to work well together and build shared vision. Many studies involving dialogue are action research based, focusing on the use of dialogue as a reaction to solve conflict or problems in organizations. Few studies exist that focus on communication among and between teachers and leaders (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006) and a limited number of studies exist that look to the field to gain understanding of how dialogue works to enhance constructivist ways of working together and building shared vision in schools. A limited number of studies show that a sense of collective responsibility in schools enhances student achievement (Lee & Smith, 1996; Lee, Smith & Croninger, 1997), but how this sense of collective responsibility emerges through dialogical experience of teachers and

leaders has not been directly studied. This study looked to the field to gain understanding of how to use dialogue in practice.

Through this study, I aimed to discover rich information from the field through an exploration of participants' understandings of dialogue rather than theoretical explanations (Creswell, 2007). This study fills a gap in research by looking to the field to learn how dialogue actually works in schools to enhance constructivist ways of doing to produce shared vision.

As people in educational organizations strive to develop appropriate practices that provide students with skills necessary for a new and complex world, this study may provide insight into how dialogue can aid in this pursuit. The study is not intended to be generalizable, but may provide initial data about the phenomenon of dialogue in educational organizations. Constructions of meaning from teacher and leader understandings of dialogue and the complexities involved in communication may contribute to theories of how dialogue can be used in practice to build constructivist ways of doing and develop shared vision in educational organizations.

The research may be valuable in providing an understanding of participants' views and understandings. Gathering multiple understandings led to greater understanding of the role dialogue plays in schools.

1.6 Definitions

Coherence. A coherent view of reality is gained through attention to and incorporation of multiple perspectives into a collective conscious (Bohm, 1996).

Collective Conscious. A shared consciousness in a group of people that comes about through dialogue to form shared understanding (Bohm, 1996).

Dialogue. A special kind of communication made up of multiple parts/ perspectives to form holistic, collective understanding (Bohm, 1996). "Dialogue is the preferred style for professional conversations" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 56).

Habit of Mind. A person's or groups tendency to frame topics, issues, questions and approaches to problems, in certain ways (Stewart et al., 2004).

Holistic Habit of Mind. Problems, issues or approaches are framed with multiple perspectives—"As a habit of mind, holism is the characteristic inclination to approach a topic or problem broadly rather than narrowly, as much as possible as a totality" (Stewart et al., 2004, p. 23).

Mechanistic Habit of Mind. A habit of mind that guides people to approach and frame topics, issues or problems using only one or two perspectives (Stewart, et al., 2004).

Professional Learning Community. Groups of educators working collaboratively toward shared understanding (DuFour and Eaker, 1998).

Shared Vision. A shared mental image of a possible and desirable future state of an organization which guides decisions and action in organizations made up of multiple perspectives that come together from shared understanding (Senge, 1990).

1.7 Delimitations, Limitations, Assumptions and Positionality

As with any research approach, it is necessary to outline the delimitations, limitations and assumptions that limit this approach, in order to be transparent as to the limits of the approach and the context in which the study was conducted. The position of the researcher also affected the study.

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1.7.1 Delimitations

The study was delimited to two professional learning communities. The phenomenon of dialogue was studied within the context of the PLC. The study took place in two schools in Saskatchewan. The study began in September, 2011 and concluded in February, 2012. Data was collected through observations, focus groups, and interviews, as well as informal email communications.

1.7.2 Limitations

The study was subject to the following limitations:

1. The naturalistic study was limited by the researcher's inability to generalize conclusions because of the small sample size; however, the findings may provide insights that may inform ways of communicating in schools.

2. The observation data collection method may limit the study due to the Hawthorne effect (Roethlisberger, 1941). Participants may have changed their behaviour or communication styles because they were being observed. The focus group and interview data may limit the study because the presence of the researcher may have influenced participants.

3. The qualitative constructivist nature of the study may have limited the study because the results were derived from the participants' and researcher's constructions of understanding (Charmaz, 2005). Member checking minimized some of this limitation, but not all.

4. The study was limited by the participants' willingness and ability to describe understandings of and experiences with dialogue, as well as their ability to identify, remember, and be open and honest with, their dialogical understanding and experiences.

1.7.3 Assumptions

The assumptions the researcher held affected how the researcher understood the world and the phenomenon being studied. I assumed that shared vision exists, could be recognized, and could be expressed and understood. I assumed that there is a link between dialogue and shared vision building, that dialogue in schools existed and that it could be identified, studied, understood, and theorized. I also made the assumption that participants would be able to recognize dialogic experiences and express understandings of what the role of dialogue is in building shared vision.

1.7.4 Positionality

I have been a teacher for six years and a teacher coach for four. Throughout my teaching and leadership career, I have had the opportunity to work with a number of people in a variety of settings. The impetus for this study was mainly due to my experience as a division school board employee. Our division was engaged in making changes to education programs to address the 'gap' in performance of Aboriginal students. The question of how to address this was often raised at team and division leaders meetings. I continually suggested that we, as a division, ask the Aboriginal bands and education authorities what we can do to improve outcomes for students. This suggestion was always ignored, 'glossed over' and once dealt directly with the words "Catherine, that is a can of worms we do not want to open". From these opportunities, as division personnel, I have realized that my ability to engage in my practice is greatly affected by the way in which communication is used. I am more able to work well with people when communication is used in such a way that enables holistic perspectives and ways of doing—that acknowledges and incorporates multiple perspectives. When I can

see my own personal vision in the school's/division's shared vision, I am more connected and motivated to 'live out' the shared vision. When I have contributed my perspectives to the whole of how systems are operated and I can see my perspectives in the actions taken within the system, I feel more connected, engaged, and part of the whole system. On the other hand, when my perspectives are ignored or 'glossed over', I disengage and retreat from the school's vision becoming disconnected and isolated. A deep sense of moral purpose does keep me motivated, but with the disconnect between myself and the system, I feel I do not do my best work for students.

Also, as a teacher coach, charged with the job of building teacher capacity for increased quality of instruction I noticed that if I made space through dialogic components, such as suspension and listening, I could work well with teachers. Through creating shared understanding of the task at hand and using dialogue to build shared vision, each educator saw her perspective in the whole and teachers seemed to become more connected to their practice and the shared vision. I also noticed changes in myself. I let go of a belief in the back of my mind that there is one best way to improve instruction. I gave up this idea that there is one best way and started to become informed by multiple perspectives. I included teachers in dialogue (although at that time I did not understand that it was dialogue I was using) about our purposes, what we wanted to achieve, how we would achieve it and how we would measure our success. I believe the use of dialogue helped teachers to take ownership of their practice and be fully engaged in making changes to their practice that would reflect the divisions shared vision—because this vision included their perspectives. Dialogical processes helped me and the other teachers and leaders involved serve our students more appropriately. These

experiences led me to want to know more about how dialogical processes work in schools to enhance constructivist ways of doing in schools and the building of shared vision. There was considerable theoretical research on dialogue, as well as action research using dialogue to overcome conflict, but I wondered how does dialogue work in the field to build shared vision? What are educators' understandings of dialogue? How do people in schools engage in dialogue?, and How do people understand the process of dialogue and view the place of dialogue as a means of building constructivist ways of doing and shared vision in educational organizations?

1.8 Organization of the Dissertation

In Chapter 1, I have discussed the background to the nature of the study, the purpose of the study, research questions, the significance, definitions of language used and the limitations of the study. Also included in this chapter is my positionality which sheds light on the context initially prompting this study. Chapter 2 is a review of literature involving holism, shift of perception and dialogue, constructivist ways of doing in schools and the building of shared vision, created and sustained through dialogue. Chapter 3 describes the qualitative research design and the methodology used to conduct the research. Chapter 4 is a report of the data. Chapter 5 is an analysis of the data. Finally, Chapter 6 includes the summary of the findings, discussion, conclusions, and contributions to theory, policy, and practice; and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review summarizes the literature relating to dialogue. The review includes an exploration of broad topics related to shift of perception, holism, and dialogue. First, the broad theoretical concepts of dialogue are explained followed by a narrowed focus on components of dialogue. This is followed by a theoretical explanation of dialogue in schools, constructivist ways of doing in schools, professional learning communities and building shared vision. Lastly, existing dialogue research and field practices of dialogue are presented. Emphasis is placed on the concept of holism, as well as the need for exploring the existing role of dialogue in schools.

Dialogue is a phenomenon that is conceptualized as a holistic approach to communication. Dialogue is defined as a unique form of communication, differing from other modes of communication, such as conversation, debate and discussion, because in dialogue space is made for multiple parts/ perspectives to form holistic, shared understanding (Bohm, 1996; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Senge, 1990; Stewart, et al., 2004). Dialogue is made up of certain component such as intentionality, tensionality, listening, and suspension of judgment discussed later in this chapter. Through the collective use of these components, groups of people in communication can formulate shared understanding. The shared understanding created through dialogue enhances the ability of people to work well together, because the deliberate use of dialogue and its components ensures multiple perspective shared constructions of understanding (Bohm, 1996). Theoretically, dialogue allows for multiple perspectives to be incorporated into shared visions of ways of doing in schools. The concept of dialogue is at the heart of

discussions in the literature concerning holism and the need for a shift of perception in the ways in which understanding is formulated.

2.1 Toward a Shift of Perception

In Western culture, the way in which humans view the world has a long history influenced by the philosophical assumptions people use to understand the world. "One's philosophical assumptions have important consequences for the way in which one attempts to investigate and obtain knowledge about the social world" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 2). It is the philosophical assumptions people hold that influence how they perceive the world and build organizations. Ways of doing in society are products of the assumptions we hold. Schools are constructs built from these assumptions.

Philosophical assumptions have changed through history from ancient paradigms where it was believed that forces beyond man had an effect on people and the earth. Understanding was formulated from subjective data. The ancients gained understanding of the world through personal experience, theological experience, and in what they could not observe, manipulate or prove through experimentation (Shapin, 1996). The thinking from the ancient to the modern scientists and philosophers of the Scientific Revolution followed a shift in the philosophical assumptions people used to understand the world. Philosophical assumptions were changing—"newly discovered entities and phenomena radically unsettled existing philosophical schemes" (Shapin, 1996, p. 20). Modern philosophers and scientists believed that if they couldn't see and manipulate forces in the world, then the forces didn't exist. Subjective, theological, and personal experience began to have less influence on understanding than what could be objectively observed, manipulated or proved through experimentation. Modern empiricism called for only

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what could be seen, observed, and quantified to form understanding. Philosophical

assumptions shifted during this time from being based in subjective data to being based in

objective data. Methods for obtaining information about the world became prescriptive

and based in strict procedures for formulating understanding— ruling out any

information that could not be observed, tested, and quantified. This means that the

philosophical assumptions used to understand the world were less influenced by

subjectivity and becoming more heavily influenced by objectivity based in observation,

experimentation and measurement.

Today, these changes in the philosophical assumptions used to understand the

world during the Scientific Revolution are described using the term mechanistic

worldview. Having a mechanistic worldview entails that one's view of the world and

assumptions used to understand that world are influenced by a desire for objectivity,

rather than subjectivity (Bohm, 1996). A mechanistic worldview reflects the assumption

that understanding is formulated through attention to parts in and of themselves. Parts of

a whole are seen as separate and not dependent on each other to function properly. The

mechanistic worldview is often seen as a fragmented way in which to understand the

world. Bohm (1996) defined fragmentation as a process of dividing the world

artificially, as opposed to regarding the world as a whole. He saw that fragmentation

created artificial boundaries in the world that produce fragmented thought structures.

With fragmentation the world is not understood as a whole, but divided. This division

results in, Bohm (1996) proclaimed, the "wholeness of knowledge being lost" (p. 3). He

used an example of divisions: "On the human scale, people have been divided by race,

religion, [and] nationality with the wholeness of humanity being lost" (p. 3). With

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fragmentation we miss the benefits of knowledge and human unity that we would gain from a wholeness worldview. Bohm (1996) held that this fragmentation was appropriate for analysis of the world into separate parts, but because he believed everything in the world is connected and dependent on relationships with one other, a fragmented perspective cannot provide a full understanding of an object or phenomenon.

Bohm (1996) deplored the process of fragmentation—dividing reality into parts as opposed to seeing reality as an interconnected whole. He purported that this fragmentation treats "things as if they were independent. It's not merely making divisions, but it is breaking things up which are not really separate…Things which really fit and belong together, are treated as if they do not" (p. 49). In order to transcend the mechanistic worldview fragmented parts need to be put together to form new, more broad understandings. Things that really fit and belong together need to be treated as if they fit and belong together. The whole of an object or phenomenon can be more thoroughly understood through attention to how parts of that object or phenomenon are connected and to how these parts influence the whole.

2.1.1 New Science

Recently, philosophical assumptions guiding the way in which we understand the world and its scientific underpinnings are evolving (Shields & Edwards, 2005). Scientists and philosophers are now placing increased emphasis on relationships between parts and how these relationships effect the functioning of the whole. In this new way of thinking, as Wheatley (1999) explained, the world is now seen as a series of systems and emphasis is placed on the relationships and patterns of interaction between these systems and between these systems and the whole—for many scientists "relationships are *all* there

is to reality" (p. 32). Understanding is formulated in accordance with attention to interrelationships between parts and how these parts influence the whole.

This new way of thinking is termed the new science (Wheatley, 1999). The new science emphasizes relationships among parts and the formulation of understanding with attention to systems and the interrelationship of parts within systems. New science is characterized by a shift of perception from traditional, fragmented ways of understanding the world to new more holistic understanding that deals with complexity and diversity inherent in today's world. These traditional approaches stemming from seventeenth century assumptions are the base from which organizations are structured. As Wheatley (1999) pointed out organizations today are built from traditional philosophical assumptions—assumptions that are influenced by a desire for objectivity and a belief that understanding can only be reached if the object or phenomenon can be divided into independent parts making it quantifiable, manipulateable and observable. Connections between parts and influence on the whole are not considered in traditional mechanistic worldview ways of doing in organizations.

The new science recognizes connections between parts in a system as vital to understanding. "Unseen connections between what were previously thought to be separate entities" (Wheatley, 1999, p. 10) are now seen as an essential component to a more broad and holistic understanding of the world. In the new science a deeper sense of reality is obtained through attention to relationships (Wheatley, 1999). Objects or phenomenon "come into being and are observed only in relationship to something else. They do not exist as independent things" (p. 10). In new science there is a movement toward understanding relationships among seemingly discrete parts within systems and

toward formulating understanding holistically with attention to connections between parts and to how parts influence the whole.

2.1.2 Holistic Perspective

Holism is a concept that emphasizes the importance of the whole over the parts—a view of reality that holds complex and multi-facetted perspectives. A holistic perspective emphasizes the connectedness of all things in the world interacting with and balancing each other in a holistic manner (Bohm, 1996). In holism objects and phenomenon in the world are undivided—linked together in an interconnected whole. A holistic perspective seeks synthesis and integration rather than fragmentation (Miller, 2005). In a holistic view, understanding is not formulated by attention to parts or categories, but by synthesizing and integrating parts to form more broad, deep and whole understandings.

In Bohm's (1980) view all separate objects and events in the world around us are only relatively autonomous. They are "subtotalities" derived from a deeper, implicate order of wholeness. He characterized the state of holism as "energy of coherence" (p. 22) where recognition of all parts working together form a coherent whole understanding. Coherence is reached when understandings encompass the whole of an object or phenomenon—when parts merge together and relationships between entities are recognized to formulate understanding that holds the whole picture. He suggested we learn to view everything as part of an "undivided wholeness" (p. 11). Bohm used a description of characteristics of a flowing stream to illustrate what he meant by holism.

On this stream, one may see an ever-changing pattern of vortices, ripples, waves, splashes, etc., which evidently have no independent existence as such. Rather, they are abstracted from the flowing movement, arising and vanishing in the total process of the flow. Such transitory subsistence as may be possessed by these abstracted forms implies only a relative independence or autonomy of behaviour, rather than absolutely independent existence as ultimate substances (p. 48).

From a holistic perspective, (sometimes referred to as a Bohmian worldview) objects/phenomenon are not independent from each other. They are intrinsically connected to one another and cannot function properly without one another. Attention to these connections and how these connections influence the whole is the base for a holistic worldview.

2.1.3 Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is a relatively new concept employed by a variety of disciplines to understand how things work together and influence one another in a whole. Systems thinking is based on the belief that an object or phenomenon is best understood in the context of relationship with one another and the whole, rather than in isolation.

Systems thinking emerges with shifts in perception from mechanistic worldview to holistic perspectives. Senge (1990) used the word metanoia, which means "concerned with a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes" (p. 69) to describe the shift in perspective needed to engage in systems thinking. Systems thinking is a holistic way of understanding the world that provides "a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns rather than static snapshots" (p. 34). Interrelationships in nature, where elements such as water, air, plants and animals work together for survival, are examples of parts of systems making up the whole. If one is taken away, water for example, all of the others would die. Or if plants did not exist, oxygen would not be

produced and animals would not survive. Each seemingly discrete part is dependent on

the other—the relationships between the elements are the most important issue in the

proper functioning of a system.

Senge (1990) argued that much of what is proposed in organizational theory,

research and practice is too simplistic. Simplistic frameworks cannot be applied to

complex systems. He argued that people in organizations tend to simply focus on the

parts rather than seeing the whole organization as a dynamic process. Focus on parts

results in only fragments of situations or phenomenon understood making it so that the

whole of the situation is not seen or dealt with. Problems in organizations are better

solved by taking into consideration and connecting all of the factors that make up the

problem. Applied to organizations, systems thinking provides a holistic perspective that

focuses on connections influencing the whole. These new perspectives provide

opportunities for examining and changing philosophical assumptions guiding the way in

which educational organizations formulate understanding.

2.2. Toward a Shift of Perception in Education

Education remains heavily influenced by the mechanistic worldview (Mitchell &

Sackney, 2000). Assumptions developed during the Scientific Revolution continue to

have significant influence over the way in which people in western culture understand the

world (Shapin, 1996). From mechanistic mindsets grew definitive structures, methods,

procedures and understandings that still today have influence over the ways in which we

understand and function in the world (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Alvesson and Deetz

(1996) called for examination of the philosophical assumptions used to build and function

in organizations. Through examination of assumptions one can propose that in education,

learning, and teaching are "currently constructed in accordance with the assumptions and belief systems of a mechanistic world view" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 126). Mechanistic assumptions create structures, powerful "cultural scripts" (p. 129), in schools that are "embedded so deeply into the collective psyche that many people in the education world simply do not see any alternatives" (p. 129). Ways of doing in schools become stagnant, normed and unquestioned. Many problems arise in schools when ways of being and knowing are primarily influenced by mechanistic notions (Senge, 2000). Problems arise when people are disconnected are not reflected in the whole as a vital piece of the system. Problems, such as teacher isolation, stagnation in ways of doing, and disconnected structures in schools alienate educators and students because connections between teachers, other educators and ways of doing (structures in schools) are not made or focused on. When connections are not made between parts (students, teacher and overall structures of the school) the whole of the experience is not felt.

A system where a focus is on how parts connect with other parts and the whole, allows individuals to see how they fit into the whole of school structures and activities and how the whole fits into them.

The mechanistic view is seen as too narrow for the complexities of today's schools. Mechanistic notions narrow perspective, and ultimately understanding, because there is an assumption that there is one right way to go about the practice of education (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Believing that there is one right way to do things, entails that there is one perspective/worldview that is correct. A belief that there is one right way to do things in education leaves out many valid, helpful, and possibly more effective ways of doing education.

In recent years, schools populations have become even more diverse and complex (Shields & Edwards, 2005). There is an increased recognition of the failure of mechanistic approaches to education and an acknowledgement that these approaches do not provide people in education with the capacities needed to meet the needs of 21st century schooling (Shields & Edwards, 2005). In education, there is a need for a shift of perception (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001)—a need to look at how understanding is formulated from multiple perspectives. Throughout Canadian history, schools have functioned from the mechanistic worldview excluding indigenous perspectives (Ermine, 1995; Battiste & Barman, 1995). One best way to do education was promoted and carried out at the expense of alternate perspectives. Traditional views of schools, grounded in a mechanistic world view, continue to limit learning for all in schools as long as they remain untested and unchallenged (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Alternate understandings from multiple perspectives are increasingly coming together in schools and instead of continuing in traditional ways to exclude perspectives and ways of being and knowing, multiple perspectives are becoming more valued because they provide deeper, more inclusive, understandings of the world. Students need new and different skills in a rapidly changing world and a shift of perception (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001) in schools is proposed.

The notion of a need for a shift from old, traditional ways of being and doing in schools is inherent in educational literature over the past twenty years. This need for a transition from old to new is one that has been addressed implicitly in a number of works related to education (Battiste, 1995; Ermine, 1995; Fullan, 2003; Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Senge, 2000; Shields & Edwards, 2005). A shift from a belief that there is one way to do education correctly to a mind-set that values multi-perspective formulation of

understanding is required because there "is never just one way or even one best way" (p. 125). By accessing multiple perspectives alternatives to ways of doing education can emerge, disrupting normative "cultural scripts" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 129) and be considered as valid, possibly more effective/appropriate ways of doing education in 21st century schools.

2.2.1 With this Shift a New Educational Order

With this shift of perception, new, holistic approaches to education are emerging. Mitchell and Sackney (2001) see this shift in perception as a "new educational order" (p. 1). The new educational order is based in a new worldview, a "Bohmian worldview" (p. 1), for educational approaches to move away from mechanistic influence. Attention is beginning to turn towards approaches to education that are "grounded in a wholeness worldview" (p. 125). A wholeness worldview for education represents a fundamental shift in the philosophical assumptions used to formulate understandings and subsequent practices in educational organizations— a "shift in the ideology that shapes the understanding of schools and of professional practice" (p. 125). With this shift of perception to a wholeness worldview for education, educators are provided with opportunities to construct holistic understandings. Educators begin to work differently with this shift of perception. Collaborative relationships form, people begin to see their place in the whole of the system, the system begins to reflect individuals' perspectives and unity among parts is formed to influence the whole. A very practical example of this phenomenon in a school could be the unifying of student outcome objective across all subjects in school. Individual teachers of separate subjects could come together at the same time to link objectives. For example, the English and the Math teacher could come

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together to strengthen their programs by unifying aims, by linking student outcome objectives. Both subjects could have the focus objective for a month be to enhance student ability to problem solve. Both subjects having the same aim, unifies, de-isolated teachers, subjects and students and provides people with a larger sense of a unified whole. When students see links between subjects and teachers work together for students distinct parts integrate to form wholes. Connections between parts are apparent allowing people in the system to alternately broaden and unify understanding of that system and their place in that system.

With this shift of perception opportunity to formulate understanding using holistic perspectives in education are emerging (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Using a wholeness view of education to formulate shared understanding allows for multiple perspectives to be heard and incorporated into ways of being and doing in schools. A shift to a holistic perspective would provide possibilities for "alternate voices and understandings [to be] possible and always present (p. 124). Providing space for multiple perspectives, from a holistic approach, is the new educational order.

Threaded throughout the literature presented above is the notion that through a holistic perspective that incorporates, as a fundamental shift in perception, attention to wholes, rather than parts, attention to the relationships among parts and how these relationships influence the whole system, is more appropriate for science and education. Dialogue is theoretically proposed in these holistic approaches as a common denominator vital to creating and sustaining these more appropriate multi-perspective communications.

2.3 What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is a special kind of communication made up of multiple parts/ perspectives to form holistic, collective understanding (Bohm, 1996). Through dialogue, a space is made for multiple views, from a holistic perspective.   Dialogic processes provide acknowledgement of "the valid identities of multiple voices" (Cissna & Anderson, 2002, p. 227), making for holistic understanding. In this way, dialogue is proposed as a counter-argument to traditional, mechanistic ways of doing, because dialogue is a unique, higher form of communication that allows for understanding to form for a new and complex world in a holistic collective conscious. Dialogue is made up of components that are seen as vital contributions to systems thinking and a new educational order (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Senge, 2000; Shields & Edwards, 2005).

The ultimate benefit of dialogue is the ability to form complex multiple perspectives into a holistic collective conscious within groups of people. A collective conscious is simply a concept, created through holism, which means shared understanding. Collective conscious is built and sustained through dialogue because multiple philosophical assumptions are used to form broader, coherent understanding. A group reaches collective conscious when multiple understandings create coherent shared understanding.

Collective conscious, Bohm (1996) explained, provides a coherent view of reality and is formed when multiple perspectives inform the view. A coherent view of reality is gained through attention to and incorporation of multiple perspectives into a collective conscious. Bohm (1996) purported that acting coherently towards the whole is done through collecting multiple perspectives and incorporation of multiple perspectives to

form a coherent representation of reality. With dialogue, coherent views of reality are formed because multiple perspectives are incorporated—making the group reality more holistic. Bohm (1996) believed that the general tendency for individuals, nations, races, social groups, etc., to see one another as fundamentally different and separate was a major source of conflict in the world. It was his hope that one day people would come to recognize the essential interrelatedness of all things and would join together to build a more holistic and harmonious world.

Bohm (1996) proposed dialogue that is "aimed at getting into the whole thought process" (p.9). Bohm (1996) promoted an unfragmented dialogic atmosphere wherein dialogue becomes a collaborative process with focus on relationships and understanding that transcends fragmentation. He suggested that instead people working together, "to think coherently of a single, unbroken, flowing actuality of existence as a whole" (p. xi). Bohm (1996) suggested that as isolated individuals living in a fragmented world, we cannot create a dialogic process based on wholeness: "When people are really in communication, in some sense a oneness arises between them" (p. 187). This oneness creates coherence and is gained through holistic dialogue. Dialogue enables a coherent, holistic perspective, as opposed to fragmented and/or partial perspective, because all sides of the issue are heard and considered.

Stewart et al.(2004) explained holism to be a habit of mind consistently portrayed among philosophies of dialogue. Habit of mind is described as a person's or group's tendency to frame topics, issues, questions and approaches to problems, in certain ways. A mechanistic habit of mind for example, entails that topics, issues, or approaches to problems are framed with one or two perspectives. A holistic habit of mind means

problems, issues or approaches are framed with multiple perspectives—"As a habit of

mind, holism is the characteristic inclination to approach a topic or problem broadly

rather than narrowly, as much as possible as a totality" (Stewart et al., 2004, p. 23). In a

holistic perspective, the existence of multiple perspectives is acknowledged. A holistic

perspective is sustained through dialogue, because in dialogue multiple perspectives are

encouraged and held as valid parts of a holistic habit of mind (Stewart, et al., 2004).

Communication is not whole when some views of reality are acknowledged while others

are not. It is only in acknowledgment and incorporation of holistic multiple perspectives

that dialogue can occur.

2.3.1 Dialogue and Systems Thinking

Dialogue is seen as a vital process in systems thinking. Dialogue provides the

holistic view necessary in systems thinking and through the use of dialogue organizations

can function more effectively (Senge, 2000). Effective functioning is brought about in

systems thinking with dialogue as a way to bring about multiple perspectives and sustain

a holistic perspective in organizations, as well as a way to deal with complexity and

incorporate multiple views into a collective reality. It is believed in systems thinking that

this more holistic view created and sustained through dialogue, will make for more

effective organizations, because a more whole, thorough understanding arises through

dialogue that incorporates multiple perspectives (Senge, 2000). This incorporation of

multiple perspectives is seen a more effective way to deal with complexity and to find

solutions to problems that encompass the whole picture. Solutions are made more

appropriate through dialogue because many perspectives make up these solutions.

Instead of solutions being made from one or two perspectives in a mechanistic

fragmented worldview, dialogue in systems thinking broadens and makes more appropriate solutions to complex problems. Multiple perspectives (multiple ways of being and doing) are incorporated through the use of dialogue to make more appropriate solutions in a complex and diverse world.

2.3.2 A Response to Complexity

Traditional, mechanistic philosophical assumptions "retain a large following and a privileged position in many of our social and political institutions" (Linder, 2001, p. 657); however, dialogue has emerged as a counter argument to positivist, mechanistic paradigms, as a response to new and complex social conditions (Goodall & Kellett, 2004; Greene, 1991; Linder, 2001; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Shields & Edwards, 2005). Dialogue is needed in new and complex systems in order to expose the multiple perspectives inherent in new and complex systems. Linder (2001) explained that "a new opening for dialogue emerges in the post-war era as some philosophers turn away from the Enlightenment metaphysics toward language and experience as alternative bases for understanding" (p. 655). This means that today dialogue is emerging through an acknowledgement that applying methods developed with mechanistic philosophical assumptions are no longer always the best or the only way to obtain understanding of the world.

Through dialogue many philosophical assumptions are used to create holistic, possibly alternate, bases of understanding. Multiple philosophical assumptions are developed and incorporated into ways of doing through dialogue. The advancement of dialogue is seen as an evolutionary process that brings about "alternate ideas about meaning, identity, fulfillment, and reasoning itself" (Linder, 2001, p. 656). These

alternate ideas are produced from a focus on communication involving inter-subjective

processes within a group (Linder, 2001). Inter-subjective processes are the

interconnections between multiple perspectives/philosophical assumptions—the

emergence of which are dependent on dialogue to expose many subjective perspectives

and intertwine perspectives for greater understanding.

Dialogue is seen as a way in which to theoretically transcend traditional,

mechanistic paradigms in order to reach broader understanding. As Greene (1999)

purported, "once we do away with habitual separation of the subjective from the

objective, the inside from the outside and appearances from reality we are released from a

type of one-dimensionality" (p. 12) that the mechanistic perspective creates. Greene

defined this one-dimensionality as technical rationality based in mechanistic and

positivist notions. Dialogue provides people with opportunity to view the world outside

of one dimensionality in a holistic manner. The notion that the world viewed with one or

two perspectives is sufficient to gain understanding dissipates with the use of dialogue.

The use of dialogue helps people to view objects or phenomenon in relation to each other

and the whole. The world and phenomenon in the world can be viewed as the multi-

dimensional reality that it is.

Dialogue provides people in organizations with a way to encounter and deal with

multi-dimensional realities. Greene (1991) spoke of creating a dialogic atmosphere

wherein people create and encounter new norms that transcend this one-dimensionality.

Using dialogue processes disrupts normative processes in organizations. Often normative

structures in organizations are not questioned. Because ways of doing are products of the

assumptions people hold, using dialogue to discuss normed foundational assumptions

used to run organizations can provide people with broadened philosophical assumptions. Dialogue provides an opportunity for people to come to understand one another in a complex environment.

Complex contemporary situations frame the need for dialogue. Dialogue is proposed as a communicative action necessary for new and complex social conditions.

> The call for dialogue became a core part of our sociality in the later part of the twentieth century, and it clearly continues as a social hope as we confront the problems of a new era. Our contemporary situation is defined by complex tensions that frame the need for dialogue. The struggle of our time is to build the practices of working together. (Goodall & Kellett, 2004, p. 141)

Working together in a new and complex environment requires new ways of doing in organizations. Dialogue creates and sustains new ways of doing because processes inherent in dialogue do not allow for perspectives to remain in one or two groups philosophical assumptions. Dialogue is holistic and in that structure, multiple perspectives inform ways of doing.

2.3.3 A Unique Form of Communication

Ellinor and Gerard (1998) distinguished dialogue from other forms of communication, indicating that dialogue is unique because it is a process of gathering understanding from many parts/perspectives, as opposed to from only one or two perspectives. In other forms of communication, such as discussion or conversation, the whole is broken down into many parts making it so that only one or two perspectives contribute to the formulation of understanding. In dialogue all of the parts are considered and connections are made between parts to form holistic perspectives where many perspectives contribute to the formulation of understanding. Discussion/conversation is not dialogue because there is a focus on distinctions between parts, as opposed to

connections; defending assumptions, rather than inquiring into the source of our

assumptions; persuading, rather than learning; and gaining agreement on one meaning,

rather than creating shared meaning among many (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). A

discussion, for example, focuses on limited perspectives and in discussion there is a

possibility that some perspectives are left out. In dialogue, on the other hand, a space is

provided for all stakeholder perspectives to be expressed and considered through

connection of parts and sharing understandings. Ellinor and Gerard's (1998) comparison

is illustrated in the table below.

Table 1

Forms of Communication

Dialogue	Conversation/Discussion
Seeing the whole among the parts	Breaking issues/problems into parts
Seeing the connections between parts	Seeing distinctions between parts
Inquiry into assumptions	Justifying/defending assumptions
Learning through inquiry and disclosure	Persuading, selling, telling
Creating shared understanding among many understanding	Gaining agreement on one

Note. Adapted from *Dialogue*, by L. Ellinor & G. Gerard, 1998, New York: Wiley.

A leader in a school for example would be practicing conversation/discussion if

she was introducing a topic in order to bring the staff to agreement on one understanding

of that topic. If she, on the other hand, was looking for a holistic communication

including multiple perspectives in the formulation of understanding, the leader would use

dialogue because it is a higher form of communication that can be used to form shared

understanding that incorporates multiple views.

2.3.4 A Higher Form of Communication

Dialogue is broadly discussed in the literature as a type of communication that transcends everyday conversation and moves communication to a higher level. Goodall and Kellett (2004) developed a continuum of communication, displaying dialogue as the "highest level of communication" (p. 166). Dialogue is positioned at the upper hierarchical end of this continuum, meaning that dialogue is a form of communication that is deeper than conversation or discussion because dialogue produces multi-perspective shared understanding. This continuum is helpful for understanding the different levels of communication people can have in organizations. The continuum also makes clear differing types of communication and how dialogue differs from other forms. This model is shown in Figure 1.
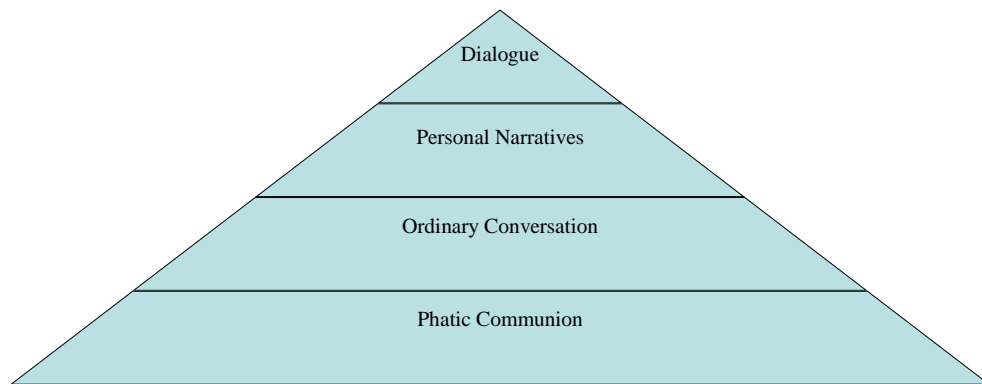
Figure 1. Communication Continuum (Goodall & Kellett, 2004)

Communication, in this conceptual ladder, moves progressively toward dialogue. In a ladder like fashion, communication moves from these *phatic* exchanges to *ordinary conversation,* to *personal narratives* to *dialogue*. Goodall and Kellett (2004) explained *phatic communion* as relatively low-level, mindless, and mostly meaningless social

exchanges. Phatic communion is a type of communication aimed at creating an atmosphere of sociability, rather than to impart information or develop shared understanding. In phatic communion getting along and being civil to one another is the main focus. The next level of communication is *ordinary conversation.* Goodall and Kellett (2004) explained this as everyday conversations where information is imparted and consensus agreement about a topic from one perspective is the aim of communication. In ordinary conversation, information is made known and the main focus is on developing general majority agreement among participants. Next is the personal narratives level. This level includes self-disclosure or personal stories as part of communication. The aim of communication is this level is the exchanging of information and stories, rather than simply imparting information. In personal narratives, gaining consensus is not a focus. The focus is on people sharing their perspectives, based on personal experience; making communication more multi-perspective. The highest level of communication is dialogue. The aim of dialogue is not gaining consensus but producing "a deepened sense of connection between one's self and others" (p. 167). In dialogue, multi-perspective shared understanding is reached through this deepened connection. Focus is in broadening perspectives in communication by incorporating multiple views to allow for holistic, deeper understanding.

2.3.5 Components of Dialogue

The components of dialogue are: tensionality, intentionality, suspension, listening, and inquiry and reflection (Bohm, 1996; Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Stewart, et al., 2004). These components are a synthesis from the literature proposing the use of dialogue and

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theoretically emerge naturally when dialogue is used (Bohm, 1996; Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Stewart, et al., 2004).

  2.3.5.1 Tensionality. Striving to form collective conscious for understanding of another's perspective from and for a holistic view requires tensionality (Stewart, et al., 2004). Tension occurs in communication, but it is what individuals do with tension that enables or hinders dialogue. Incorporating multiple perspectives in dialogue has the potential to surface multiple tensions. Tensions may arise between world views because world views may differ, or be unfamiliar or contradictory to each other. In a group conversation, for example, one participant may hold a certain perspective while another may hold a differing perspective. A debate could arise because of this difference that could end in argument of one view over the other or a complete end of the conversation. Dialogue has built in to process the condition of tensionality that allows for both views to exist and be considered simultaneously.

  In order to sustain a holistic perspective, tensions in conversation need to be acknowledged. Acknowledgment and use of tensions, inherent in conversation, creates and sustains dialogue.   Tension is used in dialogue to deepen and broaden understanding by allowing for seemingly conflicting or uncomfortable tensions to exist and be incorporated into the dialogue. Most often in conversation, attempts to overcome or to end tension distort realities (Stewart, et al., 2004). In order for holistic perspectives to develop, tensions between differing perspectives need to be held and considered, rather than overcome.   Dialogue involves "holding perspectives in tension rather than rushing to resolve them" (Stewart, et al., 2004, p. 29). Holding tensions allows for a holistic

perspective to arise because it is from these tensions that multiple perspectives inform the whole.

 2.3.5.2 Intentionality. Intention shapes the way in which people relate to each other. Dialogue requires participants to engage in communication with the intention of formulating shared understanding (Bohm, 1996). In order for dialogic atmosphere to be sustained the intent of the communication must be shared understanding. The ability to initiate and sustain dialogue is dependent on participants' initial intentions. Holding tensions in view and allowing for multiple perspectives to emerge requires the dialogue leader to be make intentions transparent. For example if a leaders proposes the idea of building shared vision, but is looking only to further his personal vision, the intent is not clear (Senge, 1990). In dialogue the intention is not to force the group to come around to your perspective as the right one, but rather to build shared understanding (Elinor & Gerard, 1998). Using communication to "manipulate and unilaterally control a conversation or a relationship", Ellinor and Gerard (1998) sated "will ultimately reap distrust and perhaps retaliation" (p. 63). Dialogue is sustained through transparent communication of intention. If the intent of the communication is to promote one's perspective or ways of knowing and doing, the participants will not be able to sustain a dialogue. Dialogue is different from discussion or debate, in that in dialogue "nobody is trying to win" (Bohm, 1995, p. 7). The distinction between dialogue and debate, then, is in intentionality. In debate the goal is "to win" and the arguments are one-sided—one viewpoint against the other. In dialogue, the goal is to search for understanding and seek to strengthen the other's argument.

2.3.5.3 Suspension. Bohm (1996) proposed suspension of judgment as a way to communicate holistically by including tensions: "suspension is a mode of awareness critical to the development of dialogue" (Stewart et al., 2004, p. 29).). Suspension, explained by Bohm (1996), is a process of holding and examining what we believe to be true as reality. According to Bohm (1996), in order for dialogue to occur, tensions can exist in dialogue through suspension. He added that a participant allows for tension to exist by "neither accepting his or her beliefs and opinions as reality nor rejecting them completely" (p. 32). The participant actively observes that he or she is experiencing beliefs and opinions and suspends judgment on them. Dialogue occurs when tensions are observed through suspension of judgment. Suspension in dialogue is employed in order to "examine the ways in which opinions and beliefs shape perspective and one's ability to experience and respond to others in dialogue" (Stewart, et al., 2004, p. 29).

Forming judgments thwarts a person's ability to engage in dialogue by blocking ability to acknowledge and use tensions to understand one's own and another's perspective (Bohm, 1996). In suspension of judgment many perspectives can surface making for more collective processes (Bohm, 1996). The practice of dialogue is influenced by the way in which participants respond to judgment. If a judgment arises in conversation, participants acknowledge that judgment and either put it aside or incorporate it into the dialogue. A judgment may arise, for example, in the mind of a participant, such as "this goes against my belief system". In making that judgment the participant has closed themselves to gaining any new learning in the conversation, or contributing their point of view. If the judgment is verbally expressed the group can identify reason for the judgment and suspend, examine and/or re-direct the dialogue to

holistically include this perspective. Tensions are incorporated in suspension to gain

holistic perspective.

       2.3.5.4 Listening. Listening is another vital property of dialogue. Bohm (1996)

suggested that an individual "be aware of the subtle fear and pleasure sensations that

block his ability to listen freely"(p. 4). For Bohm listening is the ability to attend to what

is being said at the same time as paying attention to what is blocking the ability to listen.

Listening involves both listening to self and others. A main concern for Bohm (1996) was

listening through "blocks":

> One tends to believe that one already is listening to the other person in a proper
> way. It seems then that the main trouble is that the other person is the one who is
> prejudiced and not listening. After all, it is easy for each one of us to see that
> other people are blocked about certain questions, so that without being aware of
> it, they are avoiding the confrontation of contradictions in certain ideas that may
> be extremely dear to them (p. 12).

By blocking certain parts of what is being said an individual is able to avoid any subject

that may make him uncomfortable. This can lead to an individual to think that he is

listening to what is being said, but in actuality, by blocking the uncomfortable subjects he

is subtly defending his own ideas (Bohm, 1996).

       Consideration to how we listen and for what purpose is essential to dialogue.

Listening needs to be attended to in dialogue in such a way that makes how we are

listening transparent to ourselves and others. Ellinor and Gerard (1998) added to Bohm's

(1996) ideas on listening. "How we listen, to what and to whom we listen, and the

assumptions we listen through, all frame our perception of reality" (p. 99). As part of a

holistic perspective, one must listen to all perspectives and be aware of how our

perceptions of reality filter and distort what it is we are hearing. For example, two people

engaged in dialogue that hold different world views, could bump up against each other's

words and listen through their own filters. The person listening filters out anything said that does not conform to his or her perspective, creating a distorted listening experience. In dialogue, attempts to listen to the whole of what is being said, without filtering through our own view of reality, allows for a more holistic listening session. Participants hear what is being said, not simply what has been filtered through perspective.

Ellinor and Gerard (1998) proposed that listening is done on three levels in dialogue: listen to others, listen to self, and listen for collective themes. In listening to others, one identifies what seems important for expanding ones understanding. In listening to self, one listens to their own voice and their "internal conversation" (p. 100). In listening for collective themes, one listens for shared meaning and "new streams of meaning that may want to emerge" (p. 100). Dialogue occurs by paying attention to what is being said, by paying attention to how we are hearing what is being said, and recognizing what collective meaning is emerging from this attention. A holistic, tensional dialogue is sustained through participants' ability to listen in all three ways to the whole of what is being said.

2.3.5.5 Inquiry and Reflection. Bohm (1996) explained dialogic inquiry as a process of asking questions and reflection in dialogue as a component allowing for time to process these questions. Often, he stated, a question is asked and because of inability to answer spontaneously with certainty the question is passed over. Bohm (1996) commented on reflection and the importance of time for reflection in dialogue—"if you stop to think about one point, by the time you have thought about it the group has moved on...it has become too late because the topic has changed" (p. 30). Time, Bohm

suggested, makes for space in conversation to consider multiple perspectives and, in doing so, possibly formulate new alternatives.

Engaged in a dialogue with the intention of creating shared meaning, participants use inquiry and reflection to allow for tensions and multiple perspectives to emerge. For example, a perspective may arise that is uncomfortable or not understood. In dialogue, asking questions is the norm and time to reflect on how perspective influences the whole is provided. The time is used to consider possible tensions and multiple perspectives, making communication more holistic.

Ellinor and Gerard (1998) expanded on Bohm's (1996) conceptions of inquiry and reflection. Inquiry, they stated "is about asking questions and holding an attitude of curiosity, opening the door for new insights" (p. 111). Reflection "is about holding the door open long enough for new perceptions to emerge" (p. 111). By using inquiry and reflection participants can engage in understanding multiple perspectives through holding tensions in view, and as Bohm (1996) argued, a holistic perspectives, possibly new, may emerge.

All of these components contribute to the ability in the use of dialogue to create and sustain a holistic view.

2.4 Dialogue and Schools

Schools are places in which students are to learn how to live successfully in the world. With new, complex world situations, schools need to be able to respond to and prepare people for this world. Dialogue brings about ways of doing in schools, practices of working together, that test and challenge traditional views of schools that are grounded in a mechanistic world view (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Dialogue through multi-

perspective holistic views, brings discussion about traditional approaches to education and opens more holistic perspectives needed to attend to the complexities of 21st century schooling (Shields & Edwards, 2005). Through dialogue the notion that there is one best way to do education gives way to alternate, more appropriate ways of doing education (Shields & Edwards, 2005). The use of dialogue has the potential to incorporate many ways of doing by facilitating shared understanding in schools. (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Senge, 2000; Shields & Edwards, 2005).

Dialogue is a way in which leaders and educators can attempt to broaden understanding and incorporate multiple perspectives in order to respond to this complexity. Dialogue can assist leaders and educators to attend to what students need in a new and complex world because dialogue helps to let go of traditional thought that rests on mechanistic philosophies, creating room for the alternate, adaptable and creative thought needed in a changing world. As Greene (1999) explained "the idea of making space for ourselves, experiencing ourselves in our connectedness and taking initiatives to move through those spaces seems to me to be of the first importance" (p. 1). Creating space through dialogue to form understandings of what students need in a non-mechanistic, new, complex world is essential to schools ability to prepare students. Educational organizations need to make dialogic spaces where people can encounter, realize and create visions of other ways of doing in schools (Eisner, 2002). Educational organizations need to be able to envision fresh options. Through dialogue the "forms of thinking that can develop are far more appropriate for the real world we live in than the tidy right angled boxes we employ in our schools" (p. 8)

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Bohm (1996) proposed that we share in the leadership responsibility for "acting coherently towards the whole" (p. 35). Dialogue allows for multiple perspectives to emerge and, in doing so, brings together amalgamated understanding, making group understanding more coherent. Understanding is coherent when it is collective (Bohm, 1996). In this collective understanding, individual's views are incorporated and used as part of the collective understandings. When discussing contemporary problems in communication and society in general, Bohm (1996) used the metaphor of a polluted river to describe the importance of dialogue to collect and make coherent understanding and resultant solutions in contemporary society. He argued that instead of trying to rehabilitate sections of the river, rehabilitation of the source of the problem, the mouth of the river is the priority. The source and what needs to be rehabilitated, according to Bohm, is dialogue. Once dialogue is re-established the health of the river downstream is regained and the whole of the river is restored. Dialogue acknowledges individual views and incorporates these views into shared understandings.

The use of dialogue in schools is proposed as a way in which to formulate understanding through incorporation of multi-view pictures of any given situation. Rather than one view or one right way to do things, understanding in a group is made up of several understandings to form a whole understanding. Understanding occurs when participants include the meaning of others in their own thinking—"when we seek to make sense of another person's meaning, we are engaged in the process of understanding" (Shields & Edwards, 2005, p. 66). Participants in dialogue know they are understood when another person can reflect back what was meant. The participant melds their own understanding around what was meant by another to formulate an understanding of what

was said. Many people melding other views into their own view eventually creates a

shared understanding that is reflective of all others and one's own views. Shields and

Edwards (2005) contrast understanding with prescription to illustrate the idea that

understanding is reached not through direction and prescription, but through the process

of including other points of view with their own. Understanding is reached when both or

multiple points of view are held simultaneously.

2.4.1 Dialogue and a New Educational Order

Dialogue is proposed in Mitchell & Sackney's (2000) new educational order. The

new educational order is based in a wholeness view of education (Mitchell & Sackney,

2000). Dialogue is vital to create and sustain a wholeness view that provides educators

with a process for formulating shared understanding necessary for today's complex and

diverse schools. Processes involved in dialogue are proposed for a new educational order

as a "sort of glue that holds members together" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001, p. 2).

Dialogue is seen as the glue necessary for entering into unique and higher level

communication, involving attention to relationships, as a way to formulate understanding

using holistic perspectives and for creating and sustaining a wholeness worldview for

education.

Holistic ways of doing are created and sustained through dialogue. Contemporary

situations in schools frame the need for dialogue to build practices of working well

together (Goodall & Kellett, 2004). Building the practices of working together through

dialogue can revolutionize how individuals and groups in organizations work (Ellinor &

Gerard, 1998).   Dialogue adds value to the organization by allowing the creative

resources of people in a group to enrich meanings and understanding with the group or

with groups different from themselves (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). Theoretically, through

use of dialogical components, what is important, what needs attention, and how action

can take place are defined (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998). Structures in schools do exist that

reflect, as foundational aspects, holistic, collective, philosophical assumptions. These

structures build the practices of working together that is so needed in contemporary

situations. These structures are based on constructivist philosophical assumption and use

dialogue as a way in which to attend to the needs of students in 21st century schools.

2.5 Constructivist Ways of Doing in Schools

Constructivist philosophical assumptions, over the past forty years, have

increasingly guided the way that we do education. Dialogue, whether or not educators

term their communication as such, is being used in schools. Recent research into human

development and the benefits of constructivist ways of doing have "shot gaping holes

through the mechanistic view" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 125). A constructivist

epistemology entails that philosophically one believes understanding is created socially,

rather than individually (Driscoll, 2000). Understanding, in social constructivist theory,

is constructed through social collaboration. Understanding is formed when people

interact and through new experiences found in social interactions that conflict with

previously established understandings (Driscoll, 2000).

Educators are increasingly moving towards collaborative ways of working in

schools that are "associated with a constructivist epistemology" (p. 125). The idea of

educators collaboratively working in groups, using one's own and other's knowledge,

beliefs, and experiences to construct understandings comes from social constructivist

theory (Driscoll, 2000).   As educators interact with each other, sharing ideas, adding to

previously established understandings, and thinking together understanding increases (Lambert, et al., 2002).

Constructs in schools provide opportunity for people to come together to form shared understandings. No longer is it appropriate for educators to work in isolation as separate parts of a system—"construction of knowledge is no longer a solitary pursuit in schools" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 28). Working together in collaborative ways to construct understandings is done through connections made between educators. Professional learning communities are one such construct.

2.5.1 Professional Learning Communities

A constructivist approach used in schools is the professional learning community (PLC). Working in a PLC is a constructivist way of doing in schools. I draw from DuFour and Eaker (1998) to define professional learning community as groups of educators working collaboratively toward shared understanding. Similar to communities of practice (Wenger, 1999), professional learning communities are made up of groups of people who share common concern for something and build shared understanding as they interact with each other.

Recent emphasis on educators working in collaboration reflects a shift of perception about educators' roles and responsibilities in schools. Collaborative ways of doing shifts people in schools from working as separate parts in isolation to working together. This shift is seen as more appropriate to address the constructivist belief that understanding is reached socially in interaction rather than solely in isolation. The professional learning community represents a constructivist transformation from schools run in accordance with a mechanistic world view that has guided schools in the past to

schools run with radically different philosophical assumptions (Dufour & Eaker, 1998).

Learning communities "are perceived as a break with the past, lies outside existing

paradigms and conflicts with prevailing values and norms" (Marzano, Waters &

McNulty, 2005, p. 21).

The use of professional learning communities in schools "better recognizes and

accommodates social constructions of knowledge" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 125).

The development of professional learning communities, parallels and stems from the

holistic philosophical assumptions inherent in systems thinking and new science

discussed above. Ways of doing in professional learning communities ideally reflect a

"Bohmian view" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001, p. 1). A Bohmian view is a holistic view.

A Bohmian view represents recognition and incorporation of multiple perspectives to

form shared understanding. With a Bohmian view, objects and phenomenon in the world

are better understood constructively by acknowledging the many parts that make up a

system, the connections between those parts and their influence on the whole.   In

education, using a Bohmian view means educators work together to include all views in

shared understanding. Using a Bohmian view for developing shared goals in a

professional learning community, for example, would entail gathering perspectives from

all stakeholders. Shared goals, in this view, are made by constructing understandings by

acknowledging and incorporating the multiple perspectives in the group. Each goal, then,

is informed by each member's perspective. A Bohmian view ideally helps to gain

holistic understandings of what the shared goals of the group should be.

2.5.2 Shared Vision and Learning Communities

A foundational aspect of the constructivist work involved in professional learning

communities is the development of shared vision (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Senge,

1990). A shared vision is a mental image of a possible and desirable future state of an

organization (Senge, 1990). Ideally, a shared vision is made up of multiple perspectives

that come together from shared understanding. Shared understanding needs to be in place

as the foundation from which shared vision is created (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000).

When shared vision is developed in organizations, often perspectives are left out

of that vision. When perspectives are left out understanding is not truly shared and the

vision cannot be truly shared (Senge, 1990). In traditional hierarchical organizations

vision is often prescribed by the leader and people are expected to take that vision on as

their own—"no one questions the vision emanated from the top" (Senge, 1990, p. 213).

When the big picture of an organization is not constructed using many perspectives fewer

people see their own personal vision in the whole. When fewer people see their vision in

the whole, fewer people are connected to the whole, because they cannot see how they fit

into the bigger picture. If people can see their own views in the whole shared vision they

are more connected to that vision—"It is not a truly shared vision until it connects with

the personal visions of people throughout the organization" (Senge, 1990, p. 214). In a

truly shared vision no perspectives are left out. A "truly shared vision" (Senge, 1990, p.

206) is made up of bits and pieces of each member's perspective.

By being able to see their own personal vision in the whole shared vision, people

can be truly committed to a shared vision (Senge, 1990). A shared vision brings

commitment because each person relates to the shared vision and is interconnected

through this connection to the larger whole. Creating a truly shared vision can "create a sense of commonality that permeates the organization and gives coherence to diverse activities" (p. 206). Groups of people working together from a shared vision are, theoretically more committed due to the sense of coherence felt with the whole. Coherence between parts (educators) with the whole (school systems) creates greater commitment towards the whole.

As mentioned above, in systems thinking parts of the whole and interconnections between parts are considered and recognized in the function of the whole. When organizations can grasp systems thinking there is a possibility of bringing about shared vision (Senge, 1990). In systems thinking shared vision is created with many parts informing the whole. Many individual visions make up the organizations shared vision. Senge uses Bohm's (1980) example of a hologram to explain. "If you divide a hologram each part shows the whole image. Likewise when a group of people come to share a vision for an organization, each person sees his own picture of the organization at its best. Each person shares a responsibility for the whole not just for his piece" (p. 212). This metaphor helps us to imagine the concept of shared vision—a whole picture divided into parts that still hold the image of the whole picture. Each part is reflective of the whole at the same time as being a distinctive part. Shared understanding is formulated through unearthing shared pictures of the future through a wholeness perspective (systems thinking) that allows for multiple perspectives to form this shared picture (Senge, 1990).

Educational organizations are diverse institutions with many activities happening at the same time. Educators are all working with different goals, grade levels, students, subject matter and curriculums. In this system educators can become isolated and

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disconnected from the whole system of the school. By developing a shared vision these diverse activities can come together more coherently in a holistic manner (Senge, 1990). For example, the shared vision of a school or school division may have something to do with creating self-directed learners. With this shared vision, individual's goals, grade levels, subject matter and curriculums would have a general theme of self-direction and educators could learn from one another skills for creating self-directed learners. Lessons, learning, educators and students in the school would be linked with this shared vision. Through the use of shared vision, activities are not isolated from one another, they are a system—a part of a coherent whole, interconnected and connected to the larger whole.

Building shared vision is a collaborative "process of negotiation among multiple people with different knowledge bases, histories, hopes and aspirations, personal styles and emotions, desires and needs" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 4). Developing shared vision in schools provides the opportunity for educators to gain insight from each other by being exposed to and negotiating with each other's perspectives. Insight is gained from negotiation of multiple perspectives. Four different opinions, for example, about what should be included in the shared vision for a school, could exist. In building 'truly' shared vision these opinions are recognized, talked about, and formed into the whole shared vision.

2.6 Building Capacity to Work Well Together

Working well together in schools is dependent on the way in which people communicate and high quality of communication is dependent on the ways in which people work together. A challenge in professional learning communities is to develop atmospheres in which people can work well enough together to develop shared

understanding (Dufour, Dufour & Eaker, 2005). Although shared vision is a foundational aspect from which a professional learning community functions, it is difficult to build the capacity to develop the shared understanding that leads to shared vision. Creating a shared vision in an organization entails building the capacity among people to form and hold a shared picture of the future they seek to create (Senge, 1990). A shared picture is formed through the capacity for quality communication between educators.

Educators work together collaboratively to develop understandings through communication (Driscoll, 2000). Communication is an organizational capacity referring to the ability of people to relate with each other and work well together (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Ability to work together is dependent on the way in which people in the group relate to each other to form shared understanding (Wenger, 1999). Having high organizational capacity means a group relates to each other using the communication skills necessary to relate well, understand each other, form shared understanding, and apply understanding gained to the work place.

The capacity for people to work well together requires more complex and sophisticated communication—dialogue (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000), and is a vital component to communicative interactions among educators working together in schools. "Collaborative efforts in schools start with and are sustained with dialogue" (Senge, 1990, p. 10). Dialogue is the preferred mode of communicative interaction because dialogue aids the development of shared understanding in collaborative settings— "dialogue is the preferred style for professional conversations" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 56). Dialogue is theoretically proposed in both professional learning community

and building shared vision to address the challenges in constructing shared understanding (Senge, 1990; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000).

A shared vision is dependent on the capacity for sustaining multiple perspectives in dialogue. Building capacity for dialogue is proposed as a way to form shared understanding because dialogue, as illustrated above, allows for the multiple visions that are needed for shared understanding and truly shared vision to coexist (Senge, 1990). Shared vision is constructed though shared understandings that are created with dialogic communicative interaction. Shared vision is created in professional learning communities with the capacity of a group to use dialogue in order to communicate in such a way that enables the group to put together multiple perspectives into shared understandings. Developing and engaging in quality interaction that create shared understanding are supported by the group's capacities to engage in dialogue (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). The existence of multiple perspectives, and the use of dialogic components to expose these perspectives, lead to shared understanding and ultimately to the ability of an organization to hold a shared vision (Senge, 1990). Each aspect in this process is dependent on the other, all aspects are dependent on dialogue, and attention to the relationship between each part is vital. Dialogue is used to expose and sustain existing multiple perspectives, these perspectives are held in view through dialogic components and attempts at building shared understanding emerge from the multiple perspectives emerging in dialogue. Each part is dependent on the other and the relationship between parts and its influence on the whole is acknowledged and used in order to increase the quality of communication and ways of working together.

Mitchell and Sackney (2000) identified a series of three organizational capacities that relate to dialogue and aid the development of shared understanding: naming and framing, analyzing and integrating, and experimenting and applying. The development of these organizational capacities is dependent on the "nature of the discourse" (p. 68) in groups of people. The three capacities detail a type of communicative action used to build shared understanding. The capacities describe the process groups undertake when working together well and are based on Bohm's (1996) theories of dialogue discussed above. Dialogue is the communicative action necessary in all three of these organizational capacities in order for groups to work well together.

2.6.1 Naming and Framing

The first phase of working together involves getting to know the context of the setting, people in the group and how the setting, the others, and the self fit in to the whole system. Naming and framing is done preferably through dialogue (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). This phase names the situation and frames how all of the parts fit in the whole. The communication in this phase is typically characterized as storytelling. From these stories members "construct shared understandings of common phenomenon" (p. 122). The naming and framing phase is a time that educators talk about the way they think, their assumptions, how they teach, old practices, and possibility begin to form new practices. Bohm's listening and suspension of judgment are vital components of this phase. Through listening and suspension, group members "confront their own thoughts and discover the thoughts of others" (1996, p. 194). Stories are expressed and because of dialogic listening and suspension the stories are incorporated as vital components of shared understanding. Dialogic processes in the naming and framing stage provide

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members "capacity to affirm one another and to listen respectfully to colleague's stories and details" (p. 122). Dialogue creates, reveals and sustains understandings and through dialogue shared understandings can be reached (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000).

A group of people, for example, in the naming and framing stage use components of dialogue mentioned above, such as listening and suspension, in their interactions with each other. The group would start with having each person describe the context from their view and how they themselves and others fit into this context. Some storied descriptions people give of the context may seem to others to be 'off the mark' or wrong. An idea, proposed action or solution to a problem may come up that is 'glossed over' or ignored. A stakeholder group, for example, may be mentioned that others tend to view as not pertinent to the task at hand. Often topics people bring up in a discussion are not acknowledged or fully considered. In this situation, suspension and listening components of the dialogue process are vital. Suspension and listening allow the perspective to be voiced and exist as a pertinent perspective.

2.6.2 Analyzing and Integrating

Through storytelling shared understanding begins to develop and dialogic processes of listening and suspension lead to the next phase. The next phase in developing the organizational capacity to work well together is analyzing and integrating. The analyzing and integrating phase is a time where leaders and educators ask questions and start to apply shared understanding to their own understanding. Analysis is a process of asking questions with the group to understand what, why and how we are teaching (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). Through the analysis of professional stories shared understanding is furthered. Analysis leads to integration—connection between parts.

Multiple perspectives are shared, connections between perspectives are made, and amalgamation of multiple perspectives creates shared understandings. With this interpersonal capacity to analyze together and integrate multiple perspectives "educators can find their way past outdated assumptions or practices and come to grips with alternative ways of thinking, doing and being" (p. 122). From what is learned through analysis of professional stories, new insights are integrated into collective shared understanding.

The group in this phase moves from suspension and listening to inquiry. After each person has described the context, people involved, and how they fit into the context, the dialogue proceeds to members asking questions in order to integrate new understandings. Once perspectives emerge and are recognized through suspension and listening, people start to ask questions to further understanding. The stakeholder example used above can be used again here. People in the analysis and integration phase may ask why a particular group of people are considered stakeholders and ask for the reasoning behind the perspective. Through the process of inquiry, by asking questions; and through the space provided by dialogic suspension and listening, people can start to form understanding of why this particular group should or should not be involved and integrate this new or different idea about the particular stakeholder's position into existing views. In this phase, a new topic, idea, or possible solution to a problem, is not glossed over or ignored, but rather acknowledged and fully considered. Through this integration, the group can start to develop shared understanding of each stakeholder's position.

2.6.3 Experimenting and Applying

The third phase of Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) organizational capacity framework is experimenting and applying. This is a time where educators and leaders begin to experiment with and apply new ideas gained from dialogic communication with others. In this phase individuals begin to take up the notion of shared understanding and through this shared understanding begin to "see themselves as part of a collective whole" (p. 68). Individuals see their view in the collective whole and because of this, actively experiment with and apply the new insights gained from the collective whole. With the experience of experimentation and application, educators come back to the group, in the cycle of phases, and begin again with dialogic naming and framing of the new situations found from application. Dialogue is used again to name and frame these new ideas to gain even more broadened and holistic shared understanding.

A group of people working together in the experimenting and applying phase would, using the stakeholder example from above, develop a shared understanding and a collective decision about a particular stakeholder's position.   The shared understanding is formed through all of the perspectives involved and how these perspectives fit or are different from previously held perspectives. A decision about the stakeholders position is made that reflects each member's views as part of the whole view. Including or not including the stakeholder is experimented with and applied to different situations. If upon reflection on the decision, members believe the stakeholder situation needs to be looked at again, the process begins again at the naming and framing stage.

These three phases lead people in schools to create and sustain shared understanding. Dialogue in all three of these phases supports the formation of shared understanding that leads to shared vision in professional learning communities.

2.7 Dialogue Research

Along with the above theoretical literature, there is some literature regarding dialogue research and field practices of dialogue. Existing research into dialogue and groups of people using dialogue is action research with the purpose of engaging groups in dialogue to make change. Dialogue is most often used in organizations as a type of action used to overcome or incorporate tensions within a group in order to affect some sort of change. The existing research details the results of this action as action research that employs dialogue as method. The data gathered is most often presented in the form of case studies describing how dialogue was used to affect change. Vella, et al. (2004), Isaacs (1993), and Schein (1993) described such action research. Vella, et al. (2004) described several studies wherein the authors employed a seven dialogue design steps framework to multiple situations where there was a perceived need for change. Isaacs (1993) spoke of the dialogic environments necessary for engaging in dialogue with groups and Schein (1993) described the basic process most often used by facilitators of dialogue action research.

2.7.1 Seven Design Steps Framework for Dialogue

Vella, et al. (2004) described case studies done with the seven design steps. The research dealt with curriculum development for dialogue education. The case studies stemmed from a perceived need to change curriculum so that dialogue was used more often with students in teaching practices. The studies focus on curriculum and teaching

methods, but the way in which the authors went about creating change using the seven dialogue steps with educators and leaders is transferable to leadership and building shared vision. The dialogue in these steps was geared towards teaching pedagogy, but the dialogue steps for engaging educators in dialogue for the purposes of gathering data are useful for understanding how a group is engaged in dialogue. These steps are based on the classic questions who, why, when, where, what, what for and how.

Vella et al. (2004) found that the seven questions provided an opening for the necessary participant voice in dialogue. The steps were addressed one by one in the action research case studies in order to create and sustain the dialogue necessary to affect change. Participants in these dialogue case studies first addressed the who—defining who was involved in making change and who was in the context for change (students). The philosophy behind the perceived need to revise the curriculum in response to diversity shifts in school populations was discussed in this step. What, when and where defined the content to be revised, the time frame required and the contextual details of the site in which change was to take place. What for defined the educators' objectives and measurements for success in the change process. The last step described details about how change was to take place. Details were gathered about how to make change with needs assessment, focus groups using dialogue, and thematic analysis used to find similarities in multiple viewpoints. From this analysis action was taken to make change. Successful changes were made, from this process, to curriculum, ways of teaching and ways of working as a group in schools.

From this research it can be gleaned that dialogue was engaged because all viewpoints in the process of making change were acknowledged and used to form a

shared understanding. Asking who, what, when, where, why, how and what for provided

a framework to engage participants in dialogue for shared understanding. This shared

understanding enabled participants to holistically decide on what action to take.

2.7.2 Environments Required for Dialogue

Isaacs, from a series of action research sessions, found that there are ideal

environments for creating and maintaining dialogue. He called these environments

containers. Dialogue, he found, requires a container, because patterns of interaction that

create tensions inherent in dialogue need to be contained. To ensure that dialogic

atmosphere is contained requires "altering these patterns of interaction in a system so that

the group of people can directly observe them" (p. 35). Isaacs described an unstable

container as an environment of tension in interaction that thwarts ability to engage in

dialogue. Groups engaged in dialogue can move out of the unstable container, into a

stable container, with the use of suspension of judgment. Holding judgments in view for

all to see and working towards understanding where judgments come from and why, a

group can create for themselves a stable environment. With suspension dialogue

environments (containers) become stable (Isaacs, 1993).

Moving from an unstable communicative environment, where tensions are left to

decrease the quality of interaction, "requires the creation of a series of increasingly

conscious environments" (p. 34). A conscious environment is created when people

become more aware of what it is they need to do dialogically in order to engage in

dialogue. Using skills such as suspension and listening creates a stable container. Being

engaged in the stable environment allows dialogue participants to further engage in

inquiry (Isaacs, 1993). The exploration of multiple perspectives to form collective

conscious is furthered through stability in the environment. Having a stable environment can enhance quality of interaction and ability of a group to engage in dialogue. The stable environment is made up from the collective assumptions and shared understandings of the group.

Isaacs (1993) provided an example of such a dialogue environment, from action research he performed with the management of a steel corporation and a steel workers' union. The management and union had been at logger heads with issues pertaining to wages, working conditions and treatment of employees. The two sides had been arguing for twenty years and the company was about to go bankrupt because of these tensions. Isaac's used this situation as an opportunity to collect qualitative data about how to engage groups in dialogue to overcome tensions. He gathered each group to have a dialogue. He employed components of dialogue, such as suspension and listening to create a stable environment for communication. Through the dialogue process each side came to understand each other's perspectives and this enabled each side to better understand the assumptions of the other. From this understanding, the groups were able to develop shared understanding of what needed to be done to please each side and form better ways of working together. Isaacs (1993) found that he was able to bring individuals together to understand one another through the use of dialogue. The two sides came together and the company is now one of the most monetarily successful in the world.

From this research, it can be gleaned that by increasing participants' awareness of components of dialogue, people are more able to access underlying assumptions to increase the quality of interactions and incorporate each other's views into a collective

understanding. This collective understanding, made up of everyone's views, can provide people with a way in which to work well together.

A shared understanding is created in a stable container where participant's awareness of engagement in dialogic components contributes to their ability to engage in dialogue and overcome tensions. When tensions are apparent in dialogue the container becomes unstable. Participants' increasing awareness of tensions and their use of dialogue components, such as suspension, listening, inquiry and reflection create a stable dialogue environment. An increasingly conscious environment is necessary for dialogue to be created and sustained.

2.7.3 The Role of the Dialogue Facilitator

Schein (1993) purported "one of the ultimate tests of the importance of dialogue will be to find out whether or not difficult, conflict-ridden problems can be handled better in groups that have learned to function in a dialogue mode" (p. 49). Schein described the basic processes most often used by facilitators to guide groups of people in a dialogue mode to solve conflict ridden problems. He provided an example of facilitation having to do with processes for dialogue itself. When working with groups to engage dialogue it is important to explain dialogue simply. As Schein (1993) pointed out dialogue is an abstract and slightly esoteric process and "if dialogue is going to be helpful to organization processes, it must be seen as accessible" (p. 43). Schein (1993) detailed the way dialogue is described and used in groups he has observed. He suggested that the facilitator arrange the setting, organizing the physical space in a circle to create a sense of equality. Then the concept of dialogue is described in a concrete fashion as good communication. Dialogue is described as good communication to demystify the concept

and link understanding of dialogue to something we have all experienced (Schein, 1993). Instead of explaining dialogue and all of its components, dialogue facilitators use the words good communication. People can understand the concept of good communication immediately, because most everyone has had experiences with good communication (Schein, 1993). Schein described good communication differing from ordinary communication in that good communication is perceived as communication that can access underlying assumptions in a group. Good communication goes beyond simply actively listening where participants share views and share understandings to good communication where participants allow the views and understanding of others to be incorporated into their own understanding.

After dialogue is described as good communication, the participants are asked to think about an "experience of dialogue in the sense of 'good communication' in their past" (Schein, 1993, p. 44). Schein described that participants are then asked to share with a partner the characteristics of that experience. The partners are asked to share what it was in past experiences that made for good communication and write these characteristics on a flip chart. Each member reflects on these characteristics by talking about her reactions. The conversation flows naturally and everyone has an opportunity to comment if they so choose. The facilitator intervenes to clarify concepts or highlight characteristics of good communication. The dialogue session is closed by having an opportunity for participants comment in any way they choose.

From Schein's (1993) research, it can be gleaned that the dialogue action research facilitator must set up and maintain the optimum environment for dialogue. The facilitator must be aware that the creation and maintenance of dialogue is dependent on

certain proactive processes during dialogue sessions. Proactively introducing dialogue simply as good communication allows participants to go beyond the abstract concept of dialogue to the concept of good communication that is more easily understood and talked about.   Simplifying the concept provides easier access to underlying assumptions and incorporation of others views, because the concept is concrete, rather than abstract. This proactive process enhances dialogue. Having participants talk about their own experiences allows members to enter into narrative story telling. This would provide members with a foundation of personal experience to use as they engage in dialogue.

The action research studies mentioned above all detail the processes necessary for groups to engage in dialogue. The framework for dialogue, the environments for dialogue and the concept of simplifying dialogue so processes are accessible all detail certain processes necessary for the creation and maintenance of dialogue within groups of people. With these processes, dialogue can be used as a type of action to overcome or incorporate tensions within a group for affecting some sort of change.

2.8 Summary

Educational literature increasingly calls attention to the need for schools to change from old to new. The philosophical assumptions we use to understand the world have a long history and well established place in science and education. These assumptions affect the way in which we operate our schools. A shift of perception is proposed in both science and education. Holistic approaches are proposed as a way in which to gain enhanced understanding of objects or phenomenon. New science focuses on connections between parts of an object or phenomenon and their influence on the whole, rather than solely on distinct parts (Wheatley, 1999). Systems thinking also

involves a perception that attention to connections will enhance understanding by providing a more holistic picture of an object or phenomenon. In education, a new educational order is proposed that involves these same shifting perceptions: connections and holism, to provide a better understanding of doing education in a new and complex world. In all of these proposals, new science, systems thinking, and a new educational order, dialogue is the main component in this shift from traditional ways of doing to holistic, constructivist ways of doing. Dialogue is theoretically proposed as a way in which to work holistically by including all perspectives (all parts that make up the whole) to build shared understanding in order to respond to diverse populations, new complexities in schools, and appropriately serve our 21st century students.

Recent emphasis on building the practices of working together in schools through collaborative structures, such as professional learning communities, points to the shift of perception in schools that there is not one correct way to work in schools—that there are in fact many ways to go about providing students with what they need in the 21st century. An emphasis is placed on attention to the parts that make up the system, the relationship between these parts and the influence these parts have on the whole. Groups of educators engaged in dialogue can theoretically come together to form collective conscious made up of multiple perspectives. Integral to the formation of this collective conscious is dialogue for the purpose of incorporating multiple perspectives in ways of doing education. Dialogue processes, theoretically enable people in schools to obtain a holistic perspective through the incorporation of multiple perspective constructions and are seen as more appropriate for 21st century schools.

A closer look at the existing processes of dialogue, through exploration of teachers' and leaders' views and understandings of dialogue, contributes to the research by providing data from the field regarding how dialogue works in practice to enhance constructivist ways of doing, particularly building shared vision, in schools.

This review summarized the literature relating to dialogue. The review included an exploration of broad topics related to holism, shift of perception and dialogue. The broad concept of dialogue was explained followed by a narrowed focus on components of dialogue. This was followed by an explanation of constructivist ways of doing in schools, professional learning communities and building shared vision, created and sustained through dialogue. Lastly, existing empirical research regarding dialogue was presented. Emphasis was placed on the concept of holism, as well as the need for exploring the existing role of dialogue in schools.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The phenomenon of interest in this study was dialogue. The broad research question was what are professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision in schools? The epistemological basis from which this research unfolded rests on the constructivist assumption that there are multiple realities and that these realities are contingent upon what individuals construct (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Reality is socially constructed, "There exists as many constructions as there are individuals (although clearly many constructions will be shared)" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 43).

3.1 Research Rationale and Design

Rooted in the naturalist constructivist paradigm, this study was an instrumental case study investigation. I explored participants' understandings of dialogue in order to provide insights that may inform ways of communicating in schools. My decision as to which method of research to employ for this study was determined by the nature of the study and my epistemological assumptions. I chose a naturalistic method because for a study of social phenomena naturalistic methods provide a better fit than rationalistic methods (Guba & Lincoln, 1999). A qualitative constructivist perspective was consistent with this study because meanings were constructed from participants' understandings and the resultant constructions were based on the reality of the participants. An overview of the research approach can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

Overview of the Research Approach Adopted for this Study

Paradigm	Naturalistic constructivist paradigm
Methodology	Instrumental case study
Data Collection	Observation of participants Focus group and interview Observation of participants Focus group and interview
Data Analysis	Initial coding Focused coding Theoretical coding Constant comparison
Product	Insight into the use of dialogue in schools

Instrumental case study was an appropriate methodology for this study, because case study researchers define a case as a bounded system and study how that system operates (Stake, 1995). The case for this study was two professional learning communities that participated in building shared vision. By looking closely at two bounded systems, the researcher was able provide insight into how dialogue can be used within similar systems in schools. According to Stake (1995) instrumental case study is used when the researcher is looking for insight into a broader issue and through studying the case he or she will learn about the phenomenon of interest. The case is of secondary interest facilitating understanding of something else (Stake, 1995).   Instrumental case study was also used to investigate PLCs building shared vision, because dialogue is explained in the literature often as an abstract, almost ethereal concept. The concept of dialogue proper (as conceptualized in the literature) was not shared with the participants prior to the data collection in order to avoid influencing participant's interactions with

each other and influence answers in focus groups and interviews. This method of studying something (PLC members building shared vision) in order to gain an understanding of something else (dialogue) was used to gain a concrete, not abstracted, a posteriori understandings of how dialogue works in schools.

3.1.1 The Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select participants. According to Stake (1995) data must be collected with participants from whom the researcher is most likely to learn. Professional learning community members were groups of teachers more than likely using dialogue to build shared vision; therefore members from two PLCs were invited to participate. Criteria developed to aid in selection are included in Appendix B. First, two school division superintendents, considered knowledgeable experts, were asked to identify six professional learning communities which they perceive as engaging in processes that build shared vision. The definition for shared vision, a shared mental image of a possible and desirable future state of an organization which guides decisions and action in organizations made up of multiple perspectives (Senge, 1990) was used in the selection process. Then, principals from these schools were asked to participate in the short purposive sampling pre-interview (included in Appendix B). In this pre-interview principals were asked if they perceive processes of building shared vision as happening in their learning communities. From this pre-interview two schools were identified as having PLCs building shared vision. Next, the researcher invited the professional learning community members in the two selected schools. Volunteer members were asked to participate in the research using the recruiting letters included in Appendix A.

Between the two schools, a total of thirty participants were observed. Twelve members

participated in the focus groups and seven members participated in the interviews.

3.1.2 Data Collection

Consistent with the philosophical underpinnings of the interpretive constructivist

paradigm three methods of data collection were used, as Crotty (1998) suggested, to

collect multiple constructions of views: observations, focus groups, and interviews. Data

collection for this study occurred with the participants during the observations, focus

groups, and interviews, as well as short informal communications and e-mails. The

progression of the data collection is illustrated in Table 2. Member checking was

employed to check researcher's constructions with participants.

Approximately a total of four hours was spent in observation with each PLC, two

hours in the focus groups, and three hour in interviews.

Table 3

Overview of the Research Data Collection

Phases	Data Collection Approach
Phase One	Observation
Phase Two	Focus Group and Interview
Phase Three	Observation
Phase Four	Focus Group and Interview

3.1.2.1 Phase I and III: Observing. In order to gather teacher and leader

understandings of dialogue, data collection for this study involved researcher observation.

Following Crotty's (1998) suggestion that observation be used to access the phenomenon

in context to familiarize the researcher with the context and to understand the contexts that participants themselves may have difficulty articulating, observation was used with thirty members in two professional learning communities.   Observations were also used to verify that members were building shared vision in group meetings. Feedback or prompting on observed behaviours enabled participants, during interviews and focus groups to verbalize their understandings of dialogue. The observations were used to prompt feedback during the focus groups and interviews, as well as to provide points of reference for the coding of findings.

Fieldwork descriptions from observations of observable human experience, such as activities, behaviors, actions, conversations and interpersonal interactions (Patton, 2003), are presented, unanalyzed in Chapter 4.

   3.1.2.2 Phase II and IV: Focus Group and Interview. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggested, focus group discussions allow the researcher to access data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in a group setting. Focus groups allowed participants to share their understandings of dialogue in a group setting. Participants were asked to explore their views and understanding of dialogue. Listening to other members' may have helped to stimulate ideas and understandings with participants. Guiding focus group questions are included in Appendix B. The questions were not be pre-formatted—"rather than approaching measurement with the idea of constructing a fixed instrument or set of questions, qualitative researchers choose to allow the questions to emerge and change as one becomes familiar with the study context" (Krauss, 2005, p. 760). Following the focus groups, I made follow-up

appointments, or emails as required to further probe for understandings or to clarify data as required.

Interviews allowed participants to share their understandings of dialogue. I used interviews, as Charmaz (2006) recommended, to explore and reflect on understandings of the topic with the participants. During interviews, Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggested that interview questions be "broad and general so that the participants can construct the meaning of a situation. The more open ended the question, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people do in their life setting" (p. 6). The interview questions were broad and general.

The semi-structured interviews were not pre-formatted—"rather than approaching measurement with the idea of constructing a fixed instrument or set of questions, qualitative researchers choose to allow the questions to emerge and change as one becomes familiar with the study context" (Krauss, 2005, p. 760). Guiding interview questions are included in Appendix B. Following the interviews, I made follow-up appointments, or emails as required to further probe for understandings or to clarify data as required.

3.1.3 Data Analysis

Consistent with Charmaz's (2006) approach to data analysis, I analyzed the data using initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. Observations, focus groups, and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. In addition, I took notes during observations, focus groups, and interviews reflecting ideas, concepts, categories, and themes that emerged during the data collection phases. These notes provided useful departure points in the coding process.

The first method of analysis was initial coding (Charmaz, 2006). Initial coding involved engaging with the data to get a sense of the context of the study (Charmaz, 2006). The data were laid out openly and unanalyzed. I read through the data several times to "obtain an overall feel for them" (Creswell, 2007, p. 89), and capture the complex detail of what the participants said. During initial coding the goal was to pursue the data for meaningful themes (Charmaz, 2006). The researcher constructed these themes by asking basic questions of the data, such as 'What is this about? or 'What does this text communicate and how?' The data were initially categorized into broad themes reflecting what the participants said. In focused coding, the goal was to broaden and abstract initial codes into categories (Charmaz, 2006). In focused coding, the most significant and/or frequent initial codes were used to develop categories (Charmaz, 2006). The initial codes were broadened into abstract categories. These categories were then grouped together into theoretical codes by attention to relationships between categories. "Theoretical codes specify possible relationships between categories developed in focused coding" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 63). The theoretical codes form the insights in the study's findings.

During the coding process, I used the constant comparison method. Constant comparison is a method used to "compares data with data, data with categories and category with category" (Charmaz, 2005, p. 217). Codes were compared and connected to add the researcher's ability to "portray the whole picture" (Charmaz, 2006).

3.1.4 Trustworthiness and Verisimilitude

Observations, focus groups, and interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Participants read through their transcripts to check for accuracy and to ensure that the

transcripts reflected what it is they intended to communicate. Field notes were also made available at participants' request. Participants had the option of deleting or adding any information prior to returning the transcriptions and signing the transcription release form.

Using multiple methods for data collection (observations, focus groups, and interviews) enhances trustworthiness of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Trustworthiness is also be enhanced with use of direct quotations from researcher observations, participant focus groups, and interviews in the dissertation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The participants had the opportunity to share their stories through focus groups and interviews. As the researcher, I was an instrument in the data's verisimilitude (Merriam, 1998). I therefore, have ensured auditable records by audio-recording the observations, focus groups, and interviews.

The findings from the study are not intended to be generalizable, however the findings may be useful for informed decision making in practice and policy. The findings provide insight into how dialogue can be used in schools. The researcher described the findings of the study sufficiently enough so that readers may judge for themselves the applicability of the findings to their own contexts (Seale, 1999).

3.1.5 Ethical Considerations

Application for this research was made to the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research following acceptance of the proposal. The ethics certificate is included in Appendix A. Consent was obtained at the school division level. Participants were informed of the nature of the study, the data

collection methods, the data analysis techniques, and the dissemination of the information. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time before November, 2011, after which point the data were embedded in the findings. Participants were included in member checking the researcher's interpretations through respondent validation.

I used consent forms for the observations, focus groups, and interview data transcription release. I ensured confidentiality and anonymity of participants by not including the names of participants, schools, or school divisions in the study.

3.2 Summary

Dialogue in Educational Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Dialogue and Shared Vision was an instrumental case study, rooted in the naturalist constructivist paradigm. As a subjective, exploratory study, a qualitative methodology was used. Stories and understanding were gathered through three methods of data collection: observations, focus groups, and interviews. The data were analyzed using initial, focused, and theoretical coding. Constant comparison was also used in the analysis. The end product contains insights into how schools can use dialogue as a mode of communication. These insights may prove to be helpful for leaders, educators, and policy makers wishing to enhance the use of dialogue in schools.

The participants were selected using recommendations from the school division and a purposive sampling pre-interview with principals. Two schools were selected from the criteria in Appendix B. Built into the study were conditions for trustworthiness and verisimilitude with use of multiple methods of data collection, auditable records, direct participant quotations, and member checking.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF THE DATA

Building shared vision is impossible without dialogue (Focus group participant)

The purpose of this study was to explore and conceptualize professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue. Stories and understanding were gathered through observations, focus groups, and interviews, as well as short conversations, emails and phone calls. The data were collected with two professional learning communities. The data collection consisted of two observations and two focus groups with two professional learning communities in three different schools. Interviews were also conducted with willing participants from these groups. The data collected is presented below open and unanalyzed.

4.1 Organization

Data from exploration into participant understandings of dialogue in observations, focus groups, and interviews are presented in this chapter. Observational data are presented first. Focus group and interview data follows. I reserve all analysis for chapter five.

4.2 Observations

In order to gather teacher and leader understandings of dialogue, data were gathered through researcher observation. Following Crotty's (1998) suggestion that observation be used to access the phenomenon in context to familiarize the researcher with the context and to understand the contexts that participants themselves may have difficulty articulating, observation was used with thirty members in two professional learning communities.

Fieldwork descriptions from observations of observable human experience, such as activities, behaviors, actions, conversations and interpersonal interactions (Patton, 2003), are presented unanalyzed in this section.

4.2.1 Group One Observations

The first observation with group one involved twenty-four staff members. The observation took place with the whole staff, as a PLC, during a scheduled staff meeting. The data below reflects the staff members who spoke during this meeting.

At this meeting, the principal shared the agenda, which had been partially developed during their last meeting, prior to the beginning of the meeting. Staff members were asked to look the agenda over to change or add any items. The meeting focused on two main topics: staff behavior management strategies and literacy resources.

The first item on the agenda required the group to make a decision about how to collectively deal with a severe behavioural student. The staff wanted to discuss ways in which to "create the conditions for the success for this particular student" (Observation Participant). Members began with sharing stories and experiences of successful and unsuccessful behavior strategies used with the students. This discussion began with the principal describing one strategy a member used successfully with the student. The principal described how the member dealt with the issue, what strategies were used, and what the outcome was for the student. The student was "acting out and disrupting the class" on a consistent basis. The principal shared that the staff member figured out that part of the reason the student was acting out was because he was having a hard time sitting still at his desk. The teacher decided to allow the student to stand, rather than sit, and prepared a work area for the student at the back of the classroom where the fact that

he was standing would not disrupt the other students. The teacher "figured out that standing minimized the student's disruptions in class".

After this story was shared, members shared their success stories with the group. Members shared what they knew about the student, what they have done that worked well and did not work well with the student. Two members shared an experience with the student and what they did to correct the behavior problem. They had created a "time out place" in their classroom for the student, where the student could choose to go when he was feeling frustrated or angry or just needed some quiet time. The educators shared that this place minimized the students acting out, because he could choose to separate himself from what was troublesome for him and "take a time-out" until he felt better. Another member indicated that she had done the exact same action in her classroom with no success. They figured out that that particular strategy only worked if the student had immediate access to the time out place in the one classroom. They theorized that perhaps this had to do with the student "feeling more comfortable" in the time out place that was first established for him. They decided that they would only have one place, in the one classroom, for the student, and they would send him over to the one place if needed.

Another member detailed an incident in the hallway with the student. She shared her experience and what strategies she had used with the student. The student was in the hallway during class time and the teacher asked him to return to his classroom. The student ignored her and walked the other way. She followed and asked him again to return to his classroom. The student still refused and the teacher "didn't know what to do". Three other members at this point stated that they had had "the same experience". The teacher proceeded to ask the other staff member what they would do in this instance:

"I want to know what you are thinking. Does anyone know? Can anyone give me ideas about what to do?" One member suggested that during instances such as these with the student that the time out place be used. Most members agreed with saying yes and nodding their heads that in a circumstance such as this the whole staff should ask the student to return to his time out place. The members agreed that they would all suggest the time out place to the student when misbehavior was an issue. The principal, at this point, asked "Are you all okay with that?" and looked around the room for agreement. After a full minute of hearing only yes and seeing heads nodding, the meeting ended with the principal stating "Okay, we will try that and see how it works and look at this again at our next meeting".

The second observation of group one was with a smaller group of educators (five teachers and one principal). The purpose of this meeting was to share resources with one another. It had been decided at the last meeting that each member would choose one strategy from one of the resources with their class in order to report back to the whole group about how the strategy worked. Teachers, one by one, shared the strategy they had tried and how they felt about its effectiveness in their classrooms.

The members asked questions of each other, such as "how can I use this in my classroom? Can I adapt this this idea? How did you use the resource?, How did the strategy work with a particular student?" Members also added their ideas about how to better, add to, and adapt the strategy to their own context and students: "what about if we add…How about we do it this way instead?, and OK, I like that, but what about this?" One participant during this discussion expressed: "Wait, I don't understand. Let's go back, like I'm just not getting it."

After all of the members shared, a disagreement about how to use a particular resource surfaced. An editing tool had been introduced and one of the members suggested that all classroom teachers use the tool with grade level adaptations. The members decided to take a few minutes to discuss how to adapt it in each classroom. Members attempted to adapt the strategies from the resource in order to use the strategy in each of their K-7 classrooms. Four members did not "see the strategy working" in their classrooms and did not want to use it. The principal pointed out that members were not "seeing eye to eye". The communication seemed to have hit a dead end when the principal interjected with a question "What was our original intention when regarding this topic? How will the students benefit from this?" Conversation continued: "the intent is to have consistency in our classrooms" and students "will benefit from this consistency because we will be using the same tool in all grades". Another member agreed that consistency was also important to her, but she did not think that her upper elementary students would respond well to the tool. It was suggested that the upper elementary teachers "try to adapt the tool" and "change the tool" to something that they felt could be used in their classrooms. It was also suggested that members who wished to, try the suggestion in their classrooms and that the group could re-assess and revisit the idea, after it was tried, in the next meeting. At this point the principal stated "we are tired and fifteen minutes past the projected end time of the meeting. The meeting ended with the principal concluding that the staff needed to "hold off on the conversation, because you need some time to digest it", and added "I am not trying to shut down the communication, but enhance it". The item was written on the agenda for next meeting.

4.2.2 Group Two Observations

Both observations with group two took place with a six member professional learning community. There was no formal leader directing this meeting. At the first meeting, members took the first ten minutes to ask questions of each other about how they wanted to organize the meeting. Members began this discussion by stating their collective purpose: to calibrate writing criteria and develop a rubric for assessment with each other. After the informal agenda for the meeting was set, members discussed again the underlying purpose of the meeting. Members took turns and one by one went around table. Each member stated the mark given and rationale behind why that particular mark. Members discussed marks given and challenged each other in their communication "What is your rationale? I would challenge you on that" and members discussed each piece of writing until members built shared understanding: "I'm coming around to the way that you are thinking".

One member suggested that they begin to use the curriculum guidelines in the creation of the paragraph rubric assessments: "I think what would be helpful for us to come with a print off of the curriculum in each grade level with the writing component because these are the standards for us to evaluate". Participants asked many questions to gain understanding. The suggestion was not understood by all in the group and the suggesting member replied "No I agree with you. I am just saying if we had the curriculum with the expectation of the writing per grade we could maybe have a better idea of how to measure if the students are meeting expectations". The topic was dropped and members moved to a different topic.

A tension arose in the group around the writing criteria. The members did not agree on one of the standards in the rubric they were developing. One member in particular expressed that he did not want to use that standard to grade his students. The members decided that they did not have to agree with each other: "we can move on. I don't think we have to come to an agreement". Members asked each other "Do we need to come to an agreement?" and it was decided that no they did not and the learning that they gained from each other was what they were after: "Just listening to your argument, I have learned a lot from this discussion". It was agreed that that they should not be "thinking all alike. We are not robots with the same thing every time. But at least we know what the process is". This discussion created visible tension. Members moved on to another topic of discussion for about fifteen minutes. The participant that was challenged returned to the topic and continued to discuss. "Let's do it and then maybe we need to rethink it".

Another tension arose. Members discussed a perceived danger around a perspective about the writing standards that were being shared. One member expressed that he thought the standards should be used with each student in an equal manner. Another member expressed that using the standards equally, in the same way, with each student, would "hold some of the students back from creating their best work". Much discussion ensued. One member expressed:

> I think the danger there is we kill the creativity of the higher level students; the abstract thought of the kids that are more creative, and we lock them into that one way of looking at it. That is awful—that is not what we want. We want them to be creative and unique to their own writing style.

The member expressed he definitely did "not want to hold anyone back". He asked the other members questions, such as "Do you think so?, What do you mean?, Why?, and

How can I do things differently?". The meeting ended with members discussing the issue and the challenged member agreed that perhaps his approach was a bit too "cookie cutter" and that once he gets to know the students better, he will be able to branch out from using the standards in such a "rigid" manner.

The second meeting started again with members creating the informal agenda. The members then spent two hours describing their writing assignments, discussing their criteria used, and processes used to meet these criteria. During this time members discussed how each person was setting up their writing assignments. Members discussed, listened, and asked questions of each other about whether or not these assignments and elements in the assignments were reflective of the paragraph rubric. Discussion went back and forth about particular details of assignments, such as the wording of the writing prompts, the expectations written into the description of the assignment lining up with the criteria outlined in the rubric.

The idea of using the curriculum that was dropped in the first meeting was brought up again by a different member of the group. The member restated the idea brought up in the last meeting about lining the curriculum up with the standards they were developing in the rubric: "I really like your idea of lining things up a little bit more". Another member further explained what the member meant last meeting by when she suggested "using the curriculum". Members grasped the concept immediately after this explanation. One member related the concept to something that he had done with another group concluding with "that would be awesome!" The member whose idea it was in the first meeting took the floor at this point relating what the member had said about working with the other group: "Yes, that is my point. If somehow we could figure

out as a team how to differentiate" and further explained what she meant and what it would look like. The meeting ended with members agreeing to re-examine and start to work on this concept at the beginning of the next meeting.

4.3 Focus Groups and Interviews

Feedback and prompting on observed behaviours and actions enabled participants, during the focus groups and interviews to verbalize their understandings. The questions, included in Appendix B, were used as a guide, but as stated in Chapter 3, the focus group and interview questions were not pre-formatted—rather the questions emerged and changed as I became familiar with the study context (Krauss, 2005). Questions were designed to gather participant understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision. Presented below are open and unanalyzed data from the focus groups and interviews, as well as data from informal communications, emails and phone calls. The following accounts are data open and unanalyzed as told by the twelve participants: Colleen, Sue, Erica, Noni, Jen, Deb, Bob, Audrey, Kim, Brandon, Jim, and Karla.

4.3.1 Group One Focus Groups and Interview

Six members from the group one observations agreed to participate in the two focus groups, but not in the interviews. The principal (Colleen) did not participate in the focus groups, but did participate in the interviews. Therefore; the data presented below were collected from Colleen (interview), as well as Sue, Erica, Noni, Jen, and Deb (focus groups). Questions included: Tell me about the type of communication you use to build shared vision? How did you come to build shared vision? (Appendix B).   Questions in the focus groups included: What is good about the way that you communicate together?

What prompts you to work in this way together, what is needed for you to work in this way? How does the group build shared vision? (Appendix B).

4.3.1.1 Colleen's Understandings. Colleen was the formal leader of the school. Colleen had been the principal of the school for 10 years and prior to that she had taught for 15. She felt that her whole staff was a professional learning community. She felt, as the formal leader, that it was her responsibility to facilitate good communication with the staff. She did this by making sure to "ask teachers for their input, listening and having staff members lead discussions". She facilitated meetings with what she called roundtable discussions where each member around the table was asked to offer their views of the topic at hand. She engaged this meeting format because she wanted to make sure that all members "had a chance to talk and even the quietest person got time for their issues or concerns". She prefaced this comment with saying that "focused interaction is important". She understood that in their meetings and with the use of the roundtable format she was able to turn focus from herself to the other members of the group.

The roundtable format, she shared, was a reflection of the kind of work she does "behind the scenes" to facilitate good communication with her group. Her thought process and attention to details, such as meeting format, was "behind the scenes" work that she took part in to enhance communication. She also felt that "behind the scenes" it was important for her to "lead by example". Part of leading by example meant to Colleen that she "admit when I have made a mistake or need to gather more information before making a decision". She felt that if the staff needed more information before making decisions they should feel free to say so. She felt this attribute to be essential to her group's ability to build shared vision. She modeled this type of behavior "behind the

scenes" because she felt that all staff needed to admit mistakes or admit that they do not know enough about a particular topic to make an informed decision.

Colleen also shared that she believed incorporating the staff perspectives into the way in which action took place in the school was essential. She understood that in order for the group to make decisions that "are realistic and in best interest of students" that it was "very important for staff to feel that their input is important and taken into consideration". She added that her role in this incorporation of input was paramount and she began and sustained this process of incorporation with doing "more than listening" with the staff: "I have to do more than listen. They have to see that suggestions that they have contributed are incorporated". Doing more than listening, meant to Colleen, that the communication be "participatory" and that the resulting actions from the communication be reflective of the staff perspectives. Through this participatory framework, Colleen felt she facilitated good communication that reflected staff perspectives and that this made it so that decisions were "realistic and in the best interest of students".

Colleen also shared her understanding of the benefits of her "sharing the leadership role where appropriate". She felt that sharing the leadership role facilitated ability for the group to communicate well. She shared the role because she understood that "recognizing the strengths and contributions of staff is key" in communicating well together and building shared vision. By sharing the leadership role, Colleen believed that the staff benefited from her recognition of other members' abilities to lead. Colleen stated that "Good communication must become a habit" and she believed she had habitually inserted shared leadership as a habit of good communication.

Colleen also saw her role as important in her understanding that "she needs to be able to read staff and how they best communicate". She did not go into detail about this comment, but did share a poem to try to convey what she meant. She handed me the poem saying, I follow this:

FIDO

Feelings which are positive towards outcomes, processes, people and self and not strongly negative towards anything allow the interchange and understanding of **I**nformation which if specific, adequate, accurate and relevant, and understood and accepted as valid by all helps those present to make more effective **D**ecisions. If these have the commitment of those affected specify who will do what, by when, and include monitoring and coordination then the desired **O**utcomes are more likely to be realized.

4.3.1.2 Sue's Understandings. Sue, a teacher in the school with 17 years of experience, understood that the staff communicated so well together because "we respect each other". Her group had a deep professional and personal respect for each other. The respect aided them to be able to come up with decisions and actions in their school that were in the best interest of students because of the way they respect each other. She stated that when communicating in the group "Our opinions are asked for. This makes us feel we are part of it. We are asked for input". Feeling "part of it" was due to the fact that they respected each other by asking each other for input. They showed respect to one another by asking for each other for input and Sue saw this respect as foundational to their ability to 'feel part of it'.

Another part Sue understood as contributing to the way that her group communicated was the fact that they had developed "shared goals". Sue shared that the staff "developed these goals together". She felt that having shared goals made it so that teachers "collaborated better together" for students. Sue explained that "they try the goals

and discuss the outcomes with each other". Sue believed that through their shared interest in students, their respect for one another, their attention to gaining input from all members, and their feeling of being 'part of it' all contributed to their ability to communicate well together.

Sue also believed that the group communicated so well together because "We are a progressive group we try to build common knowledge". Sue understood that he group wanted to work together to do their best for students and they saw that by collaborating, respecting each other, feeling part of it, and having shared goals, they were building common knowledge that would serve students well. Sue valued this 'togetherness' as a way to improve her practice.

4.3.1.3 Erica's Understandings. Erica, a teacher in the school with four years of experience, felt that the reason they communicated so well together was because "We respect each other's knowledge in our profession. We respect each other as teachers, as individuals because we all bring something to the table." As with Sue, respect for each other, and how they showed that respect, was vital in their ability to communicate well. Respecting each other's knowledge in the profession, Erica shared, was due to the fact that they saw each other as professionals. Each regarded the other as a professional, valued and respected for their professional knowledge. Their communication was facilitated by this respect for professionalism.

Erica also shared that as well as respecting each other professionally, the group respected each other as individuals. She shared that their recognition of each other as individuals having different personalities aided their ability to communicate well with each other. Recognizing each other as individuals, Erica shared, involved a recognition

and value placed on difference. Erica believed that there were many different

personalities in their group and with these different personalities comes ability to

communicate well, develop new ideas and take action in the school. She shared:

> we have all different personalities. Like I'm an A type and I'm bossy and I like to
> get things done. Some people like to be the artsy (I'll just use this as a stereotype)
> artsy with the great ideas and out there and want to pursue that. That's what
> you're going to get with any type of a grouping you're going to have different
> personalities.

She continued to say that she appreciated this diversity in personalities and that these

differences are respected and valued in the group because all the different personalities

contributed to the ability to have great and new ideas and actions: "If we were all the

same we wouldn't be able to get a great idea and be able to deliver it because it's just

going to be the same old same old".

Erica also thought that one of the elements that contributed to their ability to

communicate well was the fact they were "very open-minded". Erica also used the words

active listening. By this she explained she meant "willingness to hear and try ideas".

Being open minded with each other, Erica understood, allowed the group to communicate

well. The group was willing to hear ideas and try the ideas: "We are very open-minded.

We will try a good idea". Erica added to this: "We will try it and we won't shoot it

down". This element was important for Erica to point out. She believed that because

they were willing to try ideas because of open-mindedness, and because of the open-

mindedness, would not 'shoot down' what it was people contributed. Erica felt these

elements very important to their ability to communicate well with each other.   Erica also

mentioned that the group functioned as a support network: "We are a support network.

We help each other".

Erica felt that amongst the teachers and the staff, she communicated well and was able to "build shared vision" and carry out resultant action, but as a whole, on the other hand, she felt that the shared vision developed for her school was "not in fact a shared vision". She recognized that the group of teachers did build shared vision around certain issues, but the overarching vision for the school was not one of the shared visions they were involved in creating. Erica felt this way because they (she and the other teachers) had not contributed to the vision. She exclaimed "the vision is made at the Ministry and then we have to follow it. That's what ours is. It isn't a shared vision". This made Erica believe that it was not in fact a shared vision.

4.3.1.4 Noni's Understandings. Noni, a teacher with 20 years of experience, shared that they communicate well together because "Our communication is for survival". Survival was the key issue for Noni. She perceived her profession as demanding, and she felt that the communication with the staff aided them in dealing with these demands: "we keep getting stuff thrown at us, thrown at us, thrown at us, thrown at us, and so our communication is our survival. That is the only way we manage to stay afloat".

Noni also felt that the overall shared vision for the school was not a shared vision. Noni felt that in order for a vision to be shared she needed to be treated like a professional, consulted and listened to, and that her ideas needed to be incorporated into the shared vision. In order to do that and build a shared vision, Noni felt that dialogue needed to be used: "The only way that you can build shared vision is to have open dialogue".

In her experiences of building shared vision with the other teachers she stated that having open dialogue made the group realize that "even when you think people are on a different page they are probably not they are just expressing it in a different way a different font or whatever you want to use as a metaphor". Noni believed the use of dialogue aided members in realizing that even though ideas were expressed in different ways by different people in her group, the ideas were similar. Dialogue helped the group to realize they were in fact "on the same page", even though they expressed ideas differently.   Shared vision, to Noni, required those 'different fonts" be realized through dialogue.

Noni did believe that within her PLC, often times, members did build shared vision. In building shared vision, Noni described that they each have roles that are dependent on each personality in the group that emerge:

> I think we all have roles that we are not even aware of that just emerge. I think probably I try to be the voice of sanity and everybody gets going because we are all keen and we want to get going and we'll go and we'll go. I am the one who will say okay guys let's stop and think about this and not with the intent of stopping it, but let's try to bring it back to where we can handle it. And other people come up with the really creative out there ideas and that is their role and I think we all kind of emerge into….

Noni did not finish this sentence. She did continue, however, with an explanation of her feelings towards the importance of being treated like a professional and valued for the experience, ability and knowledge that she has. She started this explanation with:

> What about for those of us who are somewhat seasoned and the time we have given up to go to inquiry workshops and things like that. When if you look at our lessons we are doing it we are just not calling it inquiry. Again it is that professionalism; again the fact that it has to be dictated. Come and watch me in my classroom. Don't make me write it down on a piece of paper. Don't make me go two days to a workshop.

Noni felt de-valued when she was required to attend workshops to learn about pedagogical strategies she was already using and had been using for many years. She felt that being required to go to certain types of professional development sessions did not help her in the way that was intentioned. She had a strong sense that these ways of doing were in fact used to enforce 'accountability'. She was irritated with this perceived mind-set and was irritated with having to engage in paper work she saw as "just busy work to prove that we are professionals". She expressed an alternate idea. She wanted to be held in regard as an accountable professional and offered an alternate way for people in the system to hold her professionally accountable—classroom observation. She stated that currently in the present system "proving you are a professional is your number one job". She further explained that proving her professionalism "is not through teaching in the classroom. It should be teaching in the classroom that proves we are professionals".

4.3.1.5 Jen's Understandings. Jen was a new teacher in her second month of her first year. Jen believed that they communicated well together because they had a focus on their students and a strong commitment to serving their students well: "Our investment is in the students. It is all about the students". Jen stated that everything that they did from improving their practice through communication in the PLC to organizing hotdog lunches was all done for the students. She appreciated the ways in which the staff communicated with each other and felt that the ways in which everyone worked together benefited her tremendously: "I feel the more experienced teachers are really helpful and considerate to the younger teachers which really helps". She shared that in her internships that she had been in schools where this was not the case "I have been in places where there's been this idea of like I have more experience, and I'm better and that

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sort of a thing where I don't feel that here". In the way that the PLC communicated, Jen

valued the fact that she was not made to feel like the other educators were better than her.

Jen felt that this was why they were able to communicate and work together well. She

stated that her fellow educators, instead of trying to prove that they are better than her,

actually "really want to help you become better". She explained how teachers help each

other through the ways they communicate:

> They are always offering what they know and it is never that you have to do it. It
> is like this is how I do it and it might work for you. You can take it and make it
> whatever you think will work for you.

She continued to explain that she felt that this way of being was unique to this school, in

her experience:

> What I think is unique here is when I was in different schools doing my pre-
> internship and internship, I didn't felt comfortable going to different teachers.
> There were certain teachers that I felt comfortable going to talk to. In this school
> I would go into anyone's room and say can you please help me. There's lots of
> schools where to teachers just stay in their own classrooms. I think that is what is
> unique here is that everyone is very open.

Jen believed that this attitude of openness on the part of the other educators in her group

helped her be able to communicate well as a new teacher beginning to learn what works

for her as a professional.

> Jen also appreciated the fact that when her group:

> builds on each other's ideas. It doesn't just stop with one idea. Someone will
> come up with an idea and everybody adds to it, so it doesn't start out with the
> same thing you exactly thought, but it grows because everyone adds to it.

It was important to Jen that their ways of communicating made it so that communication

did not stop at one idea, but continued to grow because everyone in the group added their

perspective. The way that the teachers communicated in and outside of their meetings,

Jen explained, benefited her practice very much. She shared an example of the group's

communication about a particular student in their school. He explained that this

communication helped her because:

> if there is something going on with one student and there is a specific way that
> you should be dealing with them or a specific routine or procedure it is shared
> with the staff. If you have an encounter with the student at recess, or if you have
> one in the hallway, you know what steps to take and how to handle it.

Shared routines and procedures were developed and this helped Jen as a new teacher.

4.3.1.6 Deb's Understandings. Deb, a teacher with 25 years experiences, added

that they communicated so well because within their group "Every one of us is here for

the students. Our focus is on the students". This focus on students, Deb believed, was

what allowed them to communicate in the way that they did. She also added to the

conversation her ideas about their communication being good due to the fact that their

context was becoming more demanding because of "all of the different initiatives that we

as a school take on".   With the increased demands of their profession:

> we communicate so well because even though some of the teachers here are so
> young and first year some of us have been doing this for a long time and we are
> all in the same boat. We all have empathy and sympathy for each other, because
> we are all in the same boat.

Having empathy and sympathy for each other in this demanding and complex

environment was vital for Deb in communicating well and working well together for

students. Deb restated this sentiment: "we can all feel for each other. We are all

experiencing the same thing. That is why we communicate so well together".

Another reason for the way in which they work together was given by Deb. Deb

explained "I think we recognize and respect each other's personalities". She explained

how she felt when encountering these different personalities and the deep respect she felt

for the personalities within her group:

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I honestly wish I could say some of the things the others say because you know everybody's thinking it. I wish I was as calm and like a breath of fresh air like some people. We respect each other, which comes with communication—with good communication.

By recognizing, and appreciating these different personalities, Deb felt that communication was enhanced and that it was due to their good communication that they were able to recognize and respect the different personalities within the group.

Deb also shared that because of their respect for each other, because of the fact that they recognized the benefits of these different personalities, and because of the fact that they communicated well together they were able to create an environment in which they felt safe from judgment: "We feel safe with each other, we won't judge each other. No judgments". This atmosphere, Deb explained, both allowed them to communicate well together and was developed out of their ability to communicate well together. Deb tried to explain this further by stating "We are intuitive with each other. We give each other space".

4.3.2 Group Two Focus Groups and Interviews

All six members from group two's observations agreed to participate in the interviews and focus groups. Therefore; the data presented below were collected from focus groups and interviews with Bob, Audrey, Kim, Brandon, Jim, and Karla. In this section participant interview data are presented first, followed by the focus group data. Questions in the interviews included: During these PLC experiences what have been the most valuable experiences and why? What prompts you to work in this way together? What is needed for you to work in this way? (Appendix B). Questions in the focus groups included: What is good about the way that you communicate together? How do you use dialogue to build this shared vision? During the meeting what did you notice

other people, or yourself, doing in the communication to further the communication? (Appendix B).

4.3.2.1 Bob's Understandings. Bob, a teacher with 20 years' experience, expressed that since working with his PLC, he has "started to feel way more student centered then in the past". He shared that he thinks that this has taken place because of "society as a whole and an understanding that we have kids in our school that maybe come to school hungry or have a rough family life". He continued: "I mean for some of the kids it's the safest place they know. For some of our kids it's the only place they are respectfully seen as a person. That has really altered my view as to what a teacher actually is". Prior to being in the PLC, Bob shared that he felt isolated: "I had nobody to share with I had nobody to talk with so the PLC has really opened that up. I think that younger teachers I mean it's a good way to bounce ideas around." Through the communication, Bob found that what is "most valuable is knowing that other people are either having the same struggles as you or having the same success as you". He found that "being able to share openly and honestly are what those experiences are like. We've had some, last year, some fairly deep discussions" and asked each other and themselves "deeply reflective questions". Bob felt that he came from a place where "we really didn't communicate, and that was hard, to having a PLC and to me it's open and honest and non-judgemental". Having the PLC, Bob thought, allowed the members to connect, have someone to talk to, and this, Bob felt was helping him to be more student centered in address the needs of his students.

Bob also mentioned what he felt about the PLC as opposed to a professional development session presented by an "outside expert". He felt that in a PLC he feels like

he is being treated more like a professional. In the PLC, Bob explained they

communicate and work together to improve practice by realizing "we have to do this and

this better" and because of their professionalism the member work towards consistency

within the groups understanding to create assessment practices that are consistent. This

consistency Bob saw as working together as professionals "we as a professional

organization need to make this better. We owe it to ourselves and our students that there

is that consistency going on". Creating this consistency was seen as better for teachers

and students and as a professional way of working together.

He continued to describe the way the PLC worked together as better than 'outside

expert' workshops or presentations, with describing a presentation the school participated

in:

> this presentation we had, I felt like people were checking on us making sure we
> were doing it right. Do we have goals; do we have a shared vision? It was more
> of a check rather than just letting that professional dialogue happen.

The PLC to Bob was a place where he felt he was being treated like a professional, where

professional dialogue happened, and this dialogue, Bob felt to be more valuable than the

traditional PD he participated in.

Bob continued to express how he thought this way of working together was more

beneficial. He stated "it has gone way past what I would get from a workshop. This is

way more beneficial to me as a teacher and as a person". Because of their ability to go

deeper into the subject, Bob felt that the work they did in the PLC was more beneficial.

The deeper exploration into the assessment and curriculum connection for him was the

benefit: "For me I think it is the connection between the assessment and the curriculum

and how that piece fits together. I think so often in the past the curriculum, the

assessment and how I teach were three separate entities". The work that the PLC was engaged in was helping Bob realize that these are not three separate entities. This new understanding reached within the PLC was beneficial and reached not through traditional 'outside expert' workshops, but within the PLC directly related to professional practice. As Bob explained the strong benefit to his own practice was key: "I see a personal benefit. It is sort of greedy, but if it is not going to benefit me I wouldn't do it. I see a huge benefit for me to do it".

Bob also commented on the high levels of professionalism he experienced with his PLC. He believed that they were able to work well together because each member treated the other as a professional. Bob explained that his members displayed professionalism when they realized when others needed information to be reframed, and realized when members needed time to think ideas through. He commented on the professionalism of one group member in particular. This member was continually interrupted and Bob understood that the member acted in the way that she did because of professionalism:

> Audrey is the ultimate professional. I could see that she was trying very hard not to let the interrupting rattle her train of thought. I consider her an "expert" in Language Arts, and she has done a ton of extra reading, research, courses, etc. on Language. I felt that there was a challenge out there from the interrupting member, and Audrey handled it with true professionalism…I think that Audrey realized that the teachers needed her information to be reframed, and they had to be given time to mull things over, before being ready to listen and accept what she was presenting.

Professionalism, in Bob's view, allowed Audrey to deal with the challenging member. She tried very hard to not get 'rattled' and to be understood. She realized that she needed to re-frame what she was saying in order to be understood.

Bob shared that the way that they communicate with each other in the PLC was helping them be more successful. He stated that "the sharing and the open honesty are just huge". He also pointed out that "having the courage to speak" was also important. Having the courage to share, be open and honest, was a big part of being able to communicate with each other well. Bob liked the fact that his PLC did not become stagnant. Bob believed that they did not become stagnant because of the fact that they communicated well together and they had room in their communication and the way that the PLC was structured to decide "what's the next step? What are we going to do? And react to the fact that they had found "something new here we can expand on". Having room in the communication for members to respond to something new, and decide what the next step is, was important to their ability to continue to work together well and not become stagnant.

Bob felt that they communicated so well in the PLC because of the way they structured the conversation: "we each went around the table we all had a spot to talk". He stated that during that time, "we had reflective time". Through their communication Bob felt that the people in his group, including himself, gained "new insight and made adjustments based on new insights or a different perspective". Bob also understood that they communicated well together because each member had the same vision: "I think the shared vision for all of us is to improve student learning and if we can improve as teachers obviously our students are going to no matter what subject area".

Bob also mentioned that using the common tool (rubric) brought them closer together, stabilized the group, and enhanced their ability to communicate with each other by opening up the dialogue between and among students and teachers:

It has brought us closer together as Language Art colleagues because we can now share and talk about common outcomes and indicators. As well, when students see teachers sharing and working together, it forces the students to consider their performance. As well, it opens up the dialogue between and among the students and different teachers. The rubric has been the stabilizer for us as Language Arts teachers. The common rubric has enabled us to see the progress with the students.

Using the common tool enhanced communication and aided teachers to see the progress they were making with the students.

Bob also felt that the reason they continued to communicate well together was because they realized students and parents were starting to recognize the common tool they were all using (the rubric). When the new students and parents came in from other schools "they had already seen that rubric and knew what I was talking about parents recognize the rubric. That is awesome." Bob shared an experience he had with a parent that stemmed from the work he had done in the PLC that validated this work for him:

Last year at the parent teacher interviews when I showed the rubric, they had seen this rubric before. I thought that was it right there— that was the key that made it so validating as a teacher. The parents say you guys are actually doing stuff that is beneficial. How much greater is my son going to feel when they use that rubric in grade 7 and 8 and when they get to 9 and 10 and it's the same rubric. So that to me was the validation of everything.

Bob saw the results of working well together with his PLC and this recognition validated the whole process. Bob believed that he had this experience because of the "common language" and the "consistency" the common language created across grades. Bob believed that this common language and consistency "really leveled the playing field for everybody and it was great". He expressed that he noticed that the consistency they were providing for the students aided them to be successful. Bob pointed out that "the strong ones have gotten stronger and the weaker ones have the biggest benefit or the biggest potential benefit from going through this process". The communication and the ways the

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PLC was working together created a common language across grades and with parents

and this consistency, to Bob, benefited everyone.

Bob pointed out that in the PLC the communication was different than other ways

of working together he had experienced in the past:

> It is different because we don't just meet to chit chat. Every time we leave there is a little homework assignment. It is not extra work or an extra project for us as teachers it is doing a project because we need to do that. None of it has been a waste. There is a purpose to it and the kids know there is a purpose to it.

The work that Bob's PLC was involved in was viewed as essential to improve practice

and because of the underlying purpose they felt towards their work, the communication

was far from chit chat. He compared this to the communication that he has experienced

in a non-PLC school:

> it is the minute and a half conversation at recess unfocused, undirected, no real reporting of anything, whereas our PLC there is a review of what we did last time, it is all written down, there is a focus, a goal, and outcomes. There is a way to evaluate.

The communication in the PLC was focused and directed by their common purpose. Bob

found that the way in which the members of his PLC communicated to work well

together for students "professionally enlightening. It is refreshing. Especially when you

teach the same class year after year it is refreshing".

When discussing the concept of maintaining momentum within the PLC, Bob

continued to describe that the PLC has to be structured so that the results from the

communication can be acted upon. He detailed an experience he had had in a previous

PLC and compared that to the work they were doing in the present PLC. Bob explained

that in a previous PLC he had been involved in the momentum to continue learning

together to improve their practice "just stopped". He explained how the group thought the

PLC just "ground to a halt" and how the group thought "It was the weird, we didn't like

it". Bob shared that he thinks that this may have been due to "direction—we need to change". Bob explained further "it was a good thing but there was just the feeling that the ship had stopped and we didn't know how to get going again". He compared this experience to the current PLC's way of working together. He found the communication to be much different and the resultant work they were doing together much deeper. He explained that he was surprised at how different the conversations were and believed this to be because they felt able to go in a different direction because of their ability to go more deeply into the subject matter: "I am very surprised at how different our conversation is this time compared to last time". Bob commented that the conversation was different because the group was able to do this deep exploration and shift in direction. The ability to change direction for deeper exploration was "the foundation of our teaching. The kicker."

Bob also saw time as an essential component to the ability to work in this way together. Bob shared that in order to work together in this way the time needs to be provided to them: "I think the component of time is always big. We aren't rushing. If we don't have the time we will cut everything short". In order to explore and reach new understandings "we need the face to face time". Not only was it important to Bob that time be allocated to PLCs, but time of day was also important. He felt that the group benefited from the fact that they were not expected to give up their personal time, because the PLC was scheduled with release time from classroom teaching:

> You know what is key, too, is that if we had to meet from 3:30-5:00 p.m. it would not be as good as it is. If we had to meet 7:30-9:00 a.m. we would be so relaxed. We take the time to read the paragraphs and time to discuss. We couldn't do that. So, like you said about getting release time. That is the key.

Bob felt that without this allocated release time the changing work that was happening in their PLC would not happen if the meetings were rushed or interrupted. Bob explained that the meetings:

> changed your perspective a little bit. We would not have done that if we were rushed. Knowing that your class is covered that is the key. I'm not having to answer the phone. I'm not having anyone knocking on the door. That is really key.

Bob felt the group needed the allocated time to delve deeper into the subject matter to not be rushed or interrupted so that the deeper shared understandings could be examined that lead to changes in perspective and practice. This, Bob felt was the foundation of their work and that because of the ways they were able to work together "is a huge benefit for students".

Along with the allocation of time, Bob felt that it was important for the PLC to make sure that leaders in the school understood all of the benefits of working in this way together. With this understanding, Bob explained, there would be continued support, time, funding and resources allocated to this way of working together. He stated that he has:

> expressed it to our principal the benefit of doing this and what we do. I think sometimes that administrators who are not involved in this don't really know what is happening. I just go on and on about the benefits. The administration has to be on board.

4.3.2.2 Audrey's Understandings. Audrey, a teacher with 13 years' experience, shared that her way of communicating within her PLC was due to the fact she has become increasingly invested in her profession. She explained how she was invested in her profession: **"**I'm really feeling overwhelmed with how invested I am and how much work there is to be done". This feeling of investment made her confident: "I feel really confident with where I am right now as a teacher and what I'm doing, I am still learning

and I still want to learn". She felt that her ability to continue to learn and her desire to learn allowed her to feel confident.

Audrey felt that her desire to learn and be a professional was fueled by her feelings of great change in her classroom: "I feel like just education itself is changing so much in the last few years. I've never ever felt as much change as I have right now". She continued to describe this change: "even the kids themselves that are coming through my class are much more diverse. The kids are coming from so many different backgrounds more and more". Audrey was sparked with her desire to continue to learn in the increasingly diverse and complex makeup of her classroom.

Audrey shared that she was involved in three PLCs and that these were "the best learning opportunity or dialogue I have had with other teachers". She explained that these were the best learning opportunities and dialogue "because it was really authentic and we were all involved in it. We all took a little bit of information from each meeting, it was really focused, and we had a plan." Audrey explained that having the focus and plan allowed her to "focus on one thing and stick with it all year and I could really see the growth because of the time we spent and the time the teachers spent talking". The focus and 'talking' in the group allowed her to see growth in her practice. She further reflected that in the PLC meetings the members were learning from each other because they were "kind of pre-teaching each other in a respectful way". Audrey felt the way they worked together in the PLC allowed them to learn together, and respectfully teach each other.

Audrey explained that she worked in this way because:

I just don't see a point in doing things in any other way. I don't think professional people need (or want) other people directing them to do things. If change or the embracing of new ideas is going to happen, it seems that sometimes it has to come from within the person themselves. The support through collaboration is an effective way of creating change, without it being a top-down approach. I have a common ground and a common respect for our teaching profession. Through my experiences working with other teachers, I understand that everyone has a different style of teaching that is comfortable, unique and effective for them. New ideas take time to penetrate our individual teaching styles. I think we all learn from each other, so even though I thought that focusing on the curriculum was an important direction, I was happy to hear about things that were working in other people's experiences that I could use too. I figure that as soon as people begin to process and make connections between their own experiences and other peoples' ideas that they can better incorporate it into their teaching.

She explained what she was thinking when she was interrupted in conversations in her PLC:

When the conversation kept going in different directions I really didn't mind at all. I just thought that maybe this isn't the time to bring this in (my ideas). I decided to try to sit back and wait for a time when bringing the curriculum discussion back would be better and we'd all be ready for it and all share the idea that it was critical. In the meantime, I figured I could learn some things from the discussion (and not to mention have a few laughs). I even thought that the discussions were going in the direction of the curriculum, so I'd try to share my ideas at different points where it might have fit. At one point, I remember when I said something about changing the rubric for different purposes of writing. Not many people liked that, so then I just started thinking about ways we could stay true to the rubric, as it was central to our meetings, but bring in the curriculum.

Audrey also mentioned the necessity for time for regular PLC meetings. She

mentioned that it was very important to have enough time to maintain the consistency of

what the group was working on. She mentioned that when there is more time between

meetings "it's really difficult to get that consistency going again because we're meeting

less. When it's such a good thing and you have such a long time in between these

meetings it's hard to sit still and wait". It was important to Audrey that they have

consistent meetings because they "were excited to share what was happening" in their

classrooms as a result of their work together in the PLC.

Audrey expressed that the work in the PLC focused on students, developing

common goals and purposes, and learning from each other. She believed they were a

"community":

> We are all working together to better our students. I learnt so much from my
> group of people. We all just had a common goal for being there and we were
> invested in it. We were very much a community of people that wanted to improve
> their own work as well as their students.

Audrey placed high value on working with her colleagues in the PLC and found that she

learned much and improved her practice and improved student learning through the

communications with her colleagues in her PLC.

Audrey felt that the PLC worked very well together because members were not

intimidating and willing to listen:

> I think that everyone had a goal and we all cared and we all shared and were
> willing to listen to each other. So if something was working well they shared and
> everyone was really open to take that. It was not intimidating.

Audrey shared "sometimes I find when you have people that are a higher level in the

division or somebody coming to speak to you, nobody really wants to say well I'm doing

this and you know what is maybe wrong". Audrey did not feel intimidated in her group

and felt that she could admit that she did not know everything and that maybe sometimes

she was wrong. She continued by saying:

> in our group everyone is humble enough to say you know I didn't do that, or that
> makes more sense, or maybe it could work. Can I get your help? Or maybe we
> should get someone in here. We did, we would get people in and talk to us when
> we needed help and it was very much a safe place.

Audrey felt that the group worked well together and their ability to communicate well with each other was because they were humble, not intimidated, could admit they may be wrong, asked for help when needed, and had a safe place with each other.

Audrey also mentioned, as an afterthought, that perhaps another reason why the group worked so well together:

> We are starting to see the students talking about the rubric and that was getting us excited. All of a sudden they were using the language after we went through the paragraph writing. The fact that they could articulate what a good paragraph looked like after all the work we did was really good.

The communications and the work they were doing in the PLCs started to take an effect on student outcomes and this excited the PLC group members and confirmed that they were working well together.

Audrey described that she felt the communication in the group was good because they had "open sharing and discussion where we were willing to hear what everyone was saying". The way in which they were communicating, using dialogue, Audrey thought was making the group more aware: "I think dialogue is about making us aware and even making our students aware". Working together in the way that they did, Audrey explained, was fuelled by their desire for consistency and their belief that if they were consistent in ways of doing in the school that this would benefit the students, educators, and parents. Audrey compared this to parenting to try to make her point more understood:

> We are all working together for our students. It is like parenting. If you've got two parents on the same page and they are working together for their child. It is the same thing here we are all working together for our students.

Audrey also believed that with consistency the educators would be seen more as a community working together to benefit students and that this would reflect that they were strong professionals who knew what it is they are doing and why. She explained:

> I think if we become consistent with our language and how we are evaluating when we have those discussions with parents it would benefit them in understanding us as a community of teachers. Even in amongst the elementary school and high school because we are all different teachers marking, so the closer we can come together with our evidence and with our support and with one another. It is strength in numbers right. We are a team saying this is what we are doing and this is why.

Strength as professionals by coming closer together in assessment practices was important for Audrey and their communication for consistency in ways of doing she saw essential to being viewed as a community of professionals.

Audrey also saw the ways that they were working together as beneficial to students. She explained that she could see from their communications in the PLC that they were connecting with each other in a way that made it so that students could more easily see the relevance in assignments. She noticed these positive outcomes when teaching her students recently and this made her feel really good about what she was doing:

> Sometimes it is hard for my students to see the relevance or why am I doing this. When I say this is the rubric from the high school and these are the things that the high school teachers are looking for, all of a sudden their attention is there because they understand how it is relevant to them. If it is just a random thing or an assignment that they are doing and they don't understand the meaning behind it and it is not tied to what a grade 7 student is supposed to be doing then I have lost them. So the greatest benefit for me is just giving that knowledge to the student and feeling really good about what I am doing.

Audrey connected this train of thought to the school's Learning Improvement Plan (LIP) and stated that in a school with a PLC she has noticed that:

the PLC talks about the LIP and the LIP actually becomes of value. You can actually work to it. Sometimes we write the plans and then forget what we even wrote on them and I know that's not supposed to happen. But at our school we have been fortunate enough to be able to have the PLC where we can actually focus on some of the goals in our LIP.

Audrey also discussed the new direction the group had decided to go in. She explained that she was interested in exploring this new understanding they had achieved but in doing so did not want to abandon what it is they were working on, but rather add to it. By exploring this new direction in this way, Audrey felt it would make her a better teacher:

> This has been so good for getting that consistency and knowing what each other is doing and how we are doing. I think now we could move to try to differentiate between the grade levels a little bit more. Even just discuss. I think for me it will make me a better teacher.

The new direction the group was taking, relating the assessment they were creating to the curriculum, Audrey saw as very beneficial to all involved. The new direction made Audrey realize, even more than she had already, that the teachers "all had a responsibility along the way". She also stated that working in this way together, changed her thinking and allowed them to more fully fulfill their responsibilities:

> I realize that I have a really important job to do here. We all have a responsibility along the way and I think that has really changed my thinking. I always knew that the curriculum is important but it has changed my thinking on it trying to understand.

Audrey saw this direction they were deciding to take as a way to improve her practice and improve communication in their group, with students and with parents and that the consistency this communication brought in their ways of doing was powerful: "I think it is powerful when we all use the same language and the curriculum and the outcomes. I don't know, it gives us more…credibility. Like we know what we are talking about".

Audrey also shared that a very important thing to her about being part of the PLC was the feelings of worth she experienced when communicating in her group. She explained that it "feels really good for me. I know that what I am doing is worth something and is counted for something and that we can build on that". Her feelings of worth and connection with the group building from her work and their work together was important for Audrey. Audrey thought that along with the feelings of worth she felt that they communicated so well together because members were engaged and invested: "Everyone has to invest in it really and engagement in what you are doing and where you are going. Everyone buying into it and saying yes this is a good thing". Audrey felt that the time given during the day was important for their ability to work in this way together: "this time given in the day is so important because nine times out of ten are not going to give up their family life time".

Audrey shared that this way of working together in the PLC is much different from ways of working in the past with a comment about how they communicated last year without the PLC as opposed to this year with the PLC:

> up until last year we didn't have a PLC so there wasn't much dialogue with really anything with what you are doing in your class. Now, I see Bob in the hallway and I say we are writing to describe a person and he says yes I know we've got the landscape. We know what is in there [the curriculum] and it is familiar with us and I don't think that would happen if we didn't have a PLC necessarily.

Audrey valued the common language they had gained from working in the PLC: "one thing for a school that doesn't operate with a PLC is the common language" and that was "lacking in any school that I have taught".

4.3.2.3 Kim's Understandings. Kim, a brand new teacher in her first year hadn't "had a whole lot of experience so far". She had been teaching for two months. The PLC group, she explained, however, had helped her very much because she could bring her questions to members: "lately I have been bringing a lot of questions about what I am doing in my classroom. If they think it's a good thing or if they've had experience with it before what works and what doesn't work." Kim shared that the PLC had made her ability to communicate with the other teachers stronger:

> I would be unsure if I'm bothering them when they need to get something done for their class. That [the PLC] is at a certain time and they always ask if I'm doing well and if I need any help they're really helpful that way.

Having the scheduled time for communication helped Kim as a new teacher. Kim viewed herself as a learner. She explained that she got involved with the PLC not sure exactly what it was. She said she wanted to participate "just to see what other teachers had to say. I didn't have a whole lot of input so I was kind of the quieter one listening to all their ideas and their discussions going back and forth".

The experience of the PLC also helped Kim feel more confident about her practice by the fact that we was able to confirm, by mostly just listening, that she was doing things correctly:

> Confirming what I was doing with my students was the right thing and setting them up for high school and getting them on the right path. So I felt good about what I was doing because I got confirmation from them that I was doing the right thing.

She explained this further: "I think that if I know more about what I'm doing I will feel more confident and it will show in the class. They will respond better to me and that will actually help their learning". Being involved in the group allowed her to learn more about teaching and that would benefit her students.

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Kim shared her understanding of the ways the group worked together. She

explained that they were:

> a group of teachers wanting to get together to have dialogues and have better
> learning experiences, create knowledge for themselves to have better
> understanding of what to teach the students, which eventually will help them [the
> students] keep up with their education

Kim saw the group was having dialogues, learning experiences, and creating knowledge

in order to benefit students. Kim felt that so far she had benefited very much. The PLC

was a "good time for me". She expressed that she believed she "can get stronger" from

the group getting together, engaging in dialogue to learn and to have a better

understanding of what to teach students.

Kim also commented that she noticed that no one was "taking charge" of the

meeting and she felt that this helped them to communicating so well together:

> Everyone wasn't taking charge right away. There wasn't one person that was like
> no I don't think that is right. I mean there were some discussions with
> disagreements, but it was open communication. They each heard each other's
> point of view.

She continued to explain that she felt that the fact that there was no one in charge and

everyone shared their point of view made it so the "communication was open, relaxed"

and because of this she was made to feel that as a new teacher she could contribute to the

conversation and know that the other members would "adjust" to what she said. She

explained how having no one in charge allowed the points of view to be shared:

> I think hearing everyone's point of view and after the views [were expressed]
> everyone said that really works or I really see it that way. Everyone was really
> open to everyone and when you walked in nobody was really in charge. It was
> kind of like whoever wants to starts to talk. There wasn't anyone in command
> telling us what to do. It really makes it an open area and more relaxed
> environment. Being a new teacher I didn't know what I was getting into and it
> is really easy and I feel like I could do what I wanted and if I had something to
> say everyone would really adjust to it.

4.3.2.4 Jim's Understandings. Jim, also a new teacher in his first year, felt that the communication in the PLC helped him as a new teacher. It helped him "figure out what the expectations were and helped him gain knowledge from other teachers" and that helped him to "be more confident". He enjoyed being in the PLC very much and felt he gained tremendously from the experience.

He pointed out that in the PLC meetings sometimes "people take the lead and talk, and I don't mind that especially for me not having a lot to say". He shared that in the PLC meeting he noticed that members were talking so much that he "can see sometimes people can't get a word in". He continued, "I'd rather have people talking too much than not enough. If no one is talking, no one is going to learn anything from it". Jim believed that the talk, even though there was much of it making it so that some people may have felt that they couldn't get a word in, was beneficial to members learning. He also noticed at times in the PLC meeting that there was debate. Members disagreed and did not always see "eye to eye". Jim felt this was also beneficial for learning by stating "debates will help you learn". Jim explained what he meant by debate and what he saw as beneficial in debate: "In debate you're getting a broader view. People kind of go back and forth and instead of having this narrow pin point of an idea you're now expanding it". Jim felt that the talking in the PLC helped educators to expand ideas and learn from one another.

Jim believed that this kind of communication benefited him and his group because it provided them "consistency with assessment". He felt that the students benefited from this communication as well: "they [students] know what they are being assessed on every year". He shared a story of his own high school experience:

> I remember when I came into grade 9. I didn't know what was going on. We are getting marked on this now? I have never learned any of that. Now I have to relearn how to write a paragraph. Because each teacher had their own system and their own way of doing things and then you go to grade 10 and another teacher wants a different thing and you have to learn it that way. It is extremely frustrating.

Jim believed that because of the work they were doing in the PLC, creating consistent assessments by gaining a broader view, communication and even debate, made it so that students had a consistent method across grades, rather than, having different methods for each individual teacher which created frustration for students.

Jim thought that they communicating well with each other because "we all got turns which was nice". He noticed that when taking turns to share and create the broader understanding he alluded to earlier that the members of the PLC are:

> not just challenging other people, you are challenging yourself with everybody else's answers. That is what you have to do as a professional you have to be open minded. You have to say okay maybe my view is not the only right view.

Being open minded, Jim believed, was his duty as a professional. Being able to challenge each other and challenge himself with other people's views was what Jim believed to be professional. He continued to explain that because of recent changes in education and because of the questions about what is 'right' one needs to be able to adapt. He stated:

> I mean people change all the time and the system has changed so much and has it ever been right? No, so what makes this way right? You always have to be willing to change and adapt and take in people's views.

Jim believed that taking in others' views was a way to adapt to change. He connected this thought to the way they operate in the PLC meetings. In the PLC meetings "the fact that we all got turns to share regardless of experience, age, regardless of anything, we all got a turn to share". Jim explained that taking in people's views required that members take turns in sharing their views.

He also shared that in the group "everyone was willing to listen and everyone was

willing to argue" and that this led them to being able to take in each other's views.   Jim

believed that ability to take in views hinged on members ability to listen, argue, and be

open minded. He stated that good communication required:

> open-mindedness and the ability to realize that you are not the only one with an
> idea. Even if you do believe you are right you have to understand that everyone is
> not going to believe what you believe. The fact that you believe something
> doesn't mean that others are not allowed to believe something different. That
> would make for good dialogue. You have to go in realizing that you are not the
> only one with an idea.

Being open minded, realizing that you are not the only one with a good idea, allowing

for people to believe something different from yourself, Jim declared is what made for

good dialogue.   Jim felt that the group's use of dialogue had a major role in their ability

to take in each other's views. Jim believed that "you can't have a shared vision without

dialogue". He stated that the collaboration necessary to build shared vision would be

impossible without dialogue: "You wouldn't be able to collaborate without dialogue.

Without dialogue shared vision doesn't happen".   He stated "dialogue lets you have

accessibility to other people's ideas or better ideas". Jim felt that the member used

dialogue to access other people's ideas. He described his idea of functioning without

dialogue within the PLC: "It would just be we'd have our own classrooms, no one would

talk and it would just be you come up with your own system when there are ten better

systems out there you just don't have access to them".

Jim believed that through the PLC and the way that they were communicating that

"he learned a lot and got suggestions based on what was being said". He shared that he

thought that this way of working together "would be really beneficial to everyone else

because it helps as a new teacher… get together with other teachers". He shared that

when her first started teaching in September, and started working with the rubric tool that

the PLC was using, he thought "oh good I have a rubric. But when I actually looked at it

I didn't know what a four was so this thing was almost irrelevant". Without the

communication in the PLC about the rubric, Jim felt the rubric was irrelevant to his

practice. He continued to explain that the communication in the PLC meeting allowed

him more understanding about the rubric tool.

> I've seen other teachers collaborating together to say that is what a good paragraph is this is a four that is why I marked it a 4. This is a 3 that is why I marked it a three. Now I can look at it and say it is a three and everyone else would think so.

Jim shared that the understanding he gained from communication in the PLC helped him

immensely:

> I've gone to just trying to survive teaching English writing to now here is exactly what we need to do instead of just hoping they do it right. I know what is right what is wrong what needs improvement. So now rather than just trying to survive now I know I have direction, a goal.

> Jim continued to explain how this way of working together and communicating

together has helped him:

> I have learned more in these meetings than I did in four years of university education. In the four hours or six hours we've done this. Without this collaboration, a person stands up there and tells me how to teach and how kids think. And then you get to the real world and you realize that is nothing like how it is. So that is the most beneficial to me.

Jim believed that the ways they were working together and communicating in the PLC

was important to his learning what he needed to learn to do his job well. He reflected

that through communication in his PLC he was becoming more knowledgeable about

what he was teaching and how he was teaching it. He also reflected that he hopes that

these meetings continue because of the benefit he sees to his practice and in his students.

He believed that the meetings would continue because of all of the members seeing value

in working in this way together. He felt that they would continue to work in this way together unless "outside forces" such as funding and release time were not provided.

4.3.2.5 Brandon's Understandings. Brandon, a teacher with 14 years' experience, shared that he was motivated first and foremost by the success he saw in his students: "my enthusiasm comes from the students being successful" and attributed this success to the PLC this year. He thought because the students were more successful that the work they were doing in the PLC was successful. He continued to explain how the PLC was successful this year by comparing the way a previous PLC he was involved with worked.   He explained in a previous PLC he was involved in that some members were:

> set in their ways and they think their way is the best. I don't want to get into the aspects of the individuals. They are really closed off to anything new and I think if they actually gave this a try that they'd see this is easier and it is good for the students. So, I think it is because they have been doing this for so long they are convinced that their way is the only way to do things and they are not willing to consider other options. I know it works for me. If something better comes along I'll do that too.

Brandon did not encounter in the PLC this year any of what he described above. The members in his PLC were open to the experience.

Brandon found that the way they worked together this year in the PLC helped guide and confirm his practice. The common focus on the rubric that they had created:

> confirms that what I have been doing is good and I'm on the right track and helps me to   stay on the right track. It assures me that if this is what we are supposed to be doing. The rubric is sort of a guideline for what we are supposed to be doing.

Brandon explained further that working with the rubric the PLC had created and the common way of assessment reassured him that he was doing his job properly:

> It re-assures me that I am doing the right thing. So there is no wondering that I am covering the material or approaching things in the right way, because I am

following the guidelines that have been set up. I know that everyone else is doing it. I know it is the right thing to do.

Through the PLC Brandon felt that he had opened up communication with others in the PLC and in the school "I have talked with other teacher more than I ever have or ever would have". He explained that he was now "talking to people that I would not normally talk to. I have had way more conversations professionally with teachers than I have had in the past and it is all because of this". He believed that it was the rubric they had created in their PLC that started these conversations:

> The rubric is a discussion point. I also find like we talk about these rubrics but I also find with the academics it has opened up a lot of academic conversations with other people in the department and in the social studies area. For a lot of people it is a common aspect that starts the conversation. If we are all working on it there is your common ground to start the dialogue.

Brandon believed that this common tool started the dialogue because it was a consistent and common aspect to the teachers practice, "It is consistent for us as teachers. There is that commonality". This commonality allowed the dialogue to start. He believed that this commonality and conversation helped with teaching the students well: "As long as [students] are learning the things they need and as long as we are teaching the things they need". He felt that the rubric they had created was the "anchor" for their ability to communicate and work well together to improve their practice. Brandon explained that the rubric was "like a road map" and continued to explain that it is like a map because "If I keep using the roadmap I will always find my way home and so will they. I will always know where I am going and so will they". He explained as well that in creating and using the rubrics they had come together to assist each other to "lighten the load" of teaching. He stated, "Many hands make light work. If we are all working together to help with this it lightens the load for everyone and it makes it easier for everyone".

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From his experiences in the PLC, Brandon felt that this was a different way of

doing than he had experienced in the past:

> The different thing is in the past there would be nothing to talk about. So now I
> further things along and I'm the one who initiates the conversations. I am the one
> that is going to talk to them about things.

Brandon believed that the conversations they were having were due to their work in the

PLC and that:

> Without PLCs there might be no conversation at least specific to education or at
> all. There are conversations that I have had with people that I wouldn't talk to
> usually. I have conversations about the specific assignments and rubrics. That is
> the basis of the discussion. What we have in common is built right in to the
> conversation, so conversations are actually productive.

Because of the commonality that the rubric created, Brandon felt that the staff

communicated more with each other and the quality of the communications was more

specific and productive. Brandon felt that the way they were working together in the

PLC was creating commonality because "we were on the same page, working towards the

same goals, using the same language and the same types of activities". Being "on the

same page" through their work within the PLC was important to Brandon because the

"collaboration has improved, the clarity of assignments and the language that we use

between classrooms makes it easier for the students all the way around. It just works".

Brandon stated that through their work in the PLC in developing the rubric that,

"generally speaking there is a real direction that is being created here. We may not

always be on the same page but we are in the same direction for the same purpose." He

shared that "it may be selfish but that you guys are making our job easier. It is helping us

be effective."

Brandon felt that the time provided to meet in the PLC was very important to their

ability to work together in this way: "if we didn't have time provided this would never

happen". He stated that the time for the PLC meetings helped because the communication in the PLC helped "change the way you think". He stated that the rubrics were also helping the students see the purpose in assignments: "if they don't see the purpose there is not a lot of effort involved. So once they see the purpose and if I say this is for you this is good for you this will help you, we are all on the same team". Time in the PLC, Brandon believed, brought everyone (students, elementary teachers and high school teachers) together as if they were all on the same team. Brandon believed that with the "consistency or commonality" gained in the PLC he was more connected by knowing that they were "all doing the same thing": "I'm not an island anymore". He continued to explain: "I mean I love the independence part of teaching. In my room it's my environment and I can create whatever. But as a whole I know that we are all doing the same things". He believed that this consistency raised his confidence level because it allowed him to feel like he was "doing what I am supposed to". Brandon felt this way because "when we talk, we become aware of all the necessary things you need to be aware of".

Brandon also mentioned that there is an idea of the longer one teaches the better they become. He likened this to a coincidence and stated that in the PLC with the rubric they developed it is not time that made him a better teacher, but the PLC:

> A coincidence that if you teach long enough you get better at what you are doing but no doubt about it since I bought into using the rubric and I use them for every single activity all the time. I know it helps them and just as importantly it helps me. It is fabulous I love it. I am all in it has been a really good step in the right direction.

Brandon felt that he was becoming a better teacher, not because of the coincidence that he had been teaching for fourteen years, but because of the work they were doing

together in the PLC. Brandon thought that he could improve even more with continued

work in the PLC.

Brandon recognized that the dialogue in the group was changing his perspective

and making him realize how he could improve his practice. The dialogue made him think

about aspects of his teaching that he hadn't thought of before. He realized that he had

modified his thinking due to group members' suggestions and his incorporation of other

perspectives:

> I realize what I can do better. When we talk I re-evaluate what I think. I've tried
> to modify my thinking and it is making me more open minded. So now I am
> trying to incorporate that. I'm trying to with a new perspective or a fresh
> perspective. I just didn't even realize it or think about it in those terms.

Reflecting on this realization, Brandon stated "you guys can disagree, that's fine, and

I'm willing to change. It helped me to look at things differently and I'm okay with that".

Brandon furthered this idea with stating "it is better for us, it is better for them. It is a

win win situation".

When discussing the new direction the group was thinking of taking Brandon

proclaimed "So if that is the direction, the branch we are going to add to these meetings I

think that is fabulous. Not only that but realizing what you can do better". Brandon felt

that the new direction was because of the fact that they realized they could do better. He

believed that he realized he could do better by re-evaluating and modifying what he

thought by considering the groups perspectives. He also took members suggestions into

his practice regardless of any certainty that it would work. He was willing to try.

> When we talk I re-evaluate what I think. I've tried to modify my thinking and it
> is making me more open minded…I'm trying to with a new perspective or a fresh
> perspective, you can't see sometimes the forest for the trees. Based on those
> suggestions and everything else, I am going to try those things. I don't know

exactly how it is going to play itself out but I am going to make an attempt next time so at least I'm going to try it.

Brandon felt that "being on the same page" through the work they were doing in the PLC and his re-evaluation, thinking about things using fresh perspective, and his willingness to try was beneficial to him: "to me there is a benefit that we are on the same page, but also individually I'm getting better with this whole process".

4.3.2.6 Karla's Understandings. Karla, a teacher with 25 years' experience, felt that through the PLC she had a positive role to play with the teachers:

> I'm finding that I'm getting feedback from some of the teachers as to some of the suggestions that I'm making. They're finding my suggestions valuable so it's adding value to my own role. It's making me feel like I'm having an impact. I feel very valued and that makes me feel like I've got an important role in the PLC and how we can work together to really make a difference for students.

She felt that through good communication in the PLC she gained ideas and was able to provide ideas: "we share ideas. They give me ideas and then I can take that and go to the classrooms with it". Karla characterized this sharing in the PLC, and the reciprocal value she found in it, as "professional energy [that she] gets from this".

The communication in the PLC, Karla found was "making me think of things in a different way, making me reflect on how I do things, and some assumptions, and maybe I need to change some of these assumptions". Through the dialogue in her PLC Karla shared that she realized:

> I had to do some adjusting. I am more in line with how others are looking at it. And this year it was nice for me to be able to help there. That made me feel like I have something to offer. I can take and give.

Through adjusting her assumptions she found that she was more in line with how others were looking at it. She stated that "especially after working for 25 years you can stagnate in the way you look at things and pushing in another direction, I think, is useful". Pushing

in another direction, adjusting assumption, and becoming more in line with others views, she stated, is "helping me as a professional for sure". She felt more like a professional when she worked in this way with her group. Karla mentioned that she appreciated the way that they communicated in their PLC because through the different information people shared she gained a "new way of looking":

> I really appreciate it. It is almost like a think aloud when we go around and share how we analyze things and how we look at things because I get information from everyone that is slightly different. I get a new way of looking at a situation.

> She commented on the fact that this year's PLC group was made up of both high

school and elementary school educators:

> when I first heard we were going to be working with the elementary schools to be honest my impression was how is that going to help. We need to be focused on grade nine, the grade 9 curriculum. We need to focus on what needs to be done here. Opening it up to other groups, and having you come, talking about progression has moved me way further ahead than just trying to keep in my little tight area within the school.

Working across high school and elementary grades, Karla first did not see the value in it. After working with the group she realized that their discussion about progression between grades and schools in the use of the curriculum and assessment practices moved her out of her little tight area and further ahead.

She commented that the group felt cohesive, that "cohesion has sort of fired a lot more". She explained this further with stating that collegiality was the basis for their ability to communicate in this way together and move to "bigger and better things" together.

> To me it is the collegiality and moving or scaffolding up to bigger and better things. I know that is a simplistic way of explaining it, but there are more important things that we need to be examining and so out of this small rubric we have been able to get that because of the communication that we have had. Karla continued to explain that they were able to work in this way together because of the fact that they felt comfortable with each other.

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She continued to explain that it was "because of the communication we have had and the comfortableness that we have established with each other that we can scaffold to bigger and better things".

She discussed how she felt that this way of working together was different from other schools she had taught in and the biggest difference was the leadership's role in facilitating the PLC process:

> I think we have excellent administrations and they empower teachers to think outside the box and work to their best for their students. So when I go to admin. I never feel shut out. Even when they don't agree with the idea they will listen. We will agree to disagree and it is a positive collegial thing. I feel like I can be open and honest with them and they can be with me. I never have to feel guarded I never have to think am I saying this the right way when I go talk to them because we will work it out.

Karla thought that the administration behaved in this way because:

> The focus in this school is all about the students. It is all about how we can make changes for the students. All about how can we make changes, what is the best way we can do this, and putting all of that together.

Karla mentioned how this is also a different way of working because they developed the common tool (rubric) and with that "common language and common expectations". She shared that when she:

> worked with another school we would have discussions on different aspects of education, but we didn't have that common focus that moved us ahead. I mean we had good ideas and we learned from each other but everybody went away and you did their work—it was kind of separate. This common tool is so integral to what we are trying to do in terms of writing skills. I think you can't even compare the two—the dialogue and what we learn from each other.

Through the dialogue in her PLC Karla felt that the "input from the other members was really important and I learned a lot from them. I found the whole

experience really positive". She shared that she could take in this input because "There

was respect there. There was no hidden agenda". Karla reflected:

> when I have heard information from others that differs with my perspectives or
> my way of looking at how things should be, I take a look at it from their point of
> view. Learning from that and then altering my own point of view as well to the
> better.

She found that through the dialogue in the PLC she was altering her way of thinking for

the better. The key to her ability to take this in was the fact that their work together "is

all about what we are doing for the kids".

> As a professional she felt that she needed to act and communicate in certain ways:

> I think that in my job I have to be a really flexible person. I work with a lot of
> different students and teachers and different points of view and I have to figure
> out how to be flexible, to listen to them but still get my point across and I have to
> accept that they will not necessarily agree with me but I try to see it from their
> point of view. So I think I am doing that every day. Trying to listen to others, try
> to understand where they are coming from and still maintain my own perspective
> but add theirs to mine and get a more complete picture of the whole thing. Instead
> of my way is the right way.

Karla felt it very important to be flexible, to add other's perspectives to her own

perspective to work well with others. She further explained:

> I find the people that I butt heads with are the people that don't take the time to
> listen to me and don't want to take a look at it from my perspective; even though I
> am listening to what they have to say and I am trying to understand what they are
> saying.

Listening and incorporating perspectives was very important to Karla. He stated that her

group had a "willingness to listen to others". Her understanding of professionalism and

working well together was contingent on the fact that members "share the knowledge

they have as a group". She explained that she did not "think we all have to be a hundred

percent all on the same page when it comes to what you are working on but as long as

you've got the collegial atmosphere where you want to learn from others and share with

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others". Karla added again that they worked in this way together because of their focus on students: "who are we trying to make a difference with? The students".

Karla shared that their ability to communicate well together was contingent on how comfortable they felt with each other:

> I think there is a certain amount of comfortableness at this table that allows us to communicate openly. Even when we disagree about something I think there is a professional collegiality that allows us to respect each other's point of view no matter what our experience level is or where we are coming from in terms of what we are teaching.

The respect for one another's point of view was the reason for the group's ability to be comfortable. She also mentioned that she liked the ability within her group to "say I was thinking this but now I am changing my mind a little bit. I think that is really good to adjust what I think".

Karla also thought that this way of working together aided the students in helping them see the larger purpose of their connected and consistent work: "we can say it to the students in a more succinct way. Because right now a lot of what we do the kids just look at as activities. They don't look at the larger purpose and it is just something that needs to be done". Karla also commented on the use of the rubric for consistency with the students. Karla explained that the group communicated and shared their understanding of how the rubric was used for consistency and added "I don't know if that is all dialogue but if we hadn't talked and share our point of views this wouldn't have happened".

Karla continued to say that this new direction would lend them "credibility". Karla felt that up until now they have lacked this consistency "but through this dialogue and discussion you bring it closer together and that would address any inconsistency". Credibility was gained through the groups' efforts to be consistent. Consistency was

important to Karla because she felt that inconsistencies in assessment across grades were

creating

> frustration with the parents with how different teachers evaluate. So if everyone
> is more consistent the parents would have a better understanding of what the
> expectations were and it would sort of ease that sort of miscommunication.

Karla felt that having this consistency would help them to communicate better with the

parents. She stated with the consistency "it becomes more precise. That is one of the

things I have gotten from this. You are examining things a lot closer and trying to

become more precise as to what you are looking for." This precision, Karla felt, would

lend credibility to what they were doing, cut down on frustrations, and allow for better

communication with students and parents.

During dialogue with her group, Karla learned a great deal: "from the dialogue I

learned a lot about what good writing looks like and should look like. Karla also shared

that through the PLC and their working together in this way:

> really breaks down that whole thing about the whole divide of elementary and
> high school. It has always been kind of us against them sort of thing. You
> haven't prepared them well enough, you're accepting way too much from these
> guys you know and that whole disconnect between elementary and high school
> teachers. It has always sort of been there and it shouldn't be there and I think that
> brings it together better as a community of learners and teachers.

Karla felt that coming together as professionals in this way allowed them to be viewed

more as a community of teachers and learners. Karla mentioned that "there is a need for

the ministry of education to recognize that there is this need and all it would take is more

meeting like this with educators to bring everyone into a more consistent way of looking

at our assessment".

Karla also shared that in other schools she worked in she did not evaluate herself

in the same way as she did at this schools: "I don't really know that in another school I

would evaluate myself like I am doing here". She continued to explain that through the dialogue in the PLC she is able to self-evaluate:

> It makes me evaluate what I am doing and come into line with the parameters that I should be using. I look at the big picture so this really helps ground me in how I should be looking at things. It gives us a common goal and a common framework to get there.

Karla continued to say that from this way of working together she "would like to see an organized approach. And I think we have got a literacy leader and a teacher librarian and I think we could start using them a whole lot more. I think that is something in the future that I could start doing".

Karla also shared her thoughts on the new direction the group was taking and that from the communication in the PLC she has expanded her thinking beyond what their original focus was and that she was not expecting that to happen:

> I thought I learned a lot from the first time I did this and I thought well this is going to be more of the same. I learned a lot from today that I will be able to take and use and I didn't think I would. For me it has gone beyond the writing rubric. I would like to talk with Audrey and learn about some of the things she is doing with literacy in her school that I think I could benefit from. Then I can share what I am doing. It's not just about the writing rubric there is more than just the writing topic that has been shared here.

Karla realized, through the groups sharing of different perspectives, that this topic had expanded in a new direction and her learning had surpassed what she had expected.

Karla felt that the size of the group mattered very much to their ability to communicate well together. She explained that last year the group was too large and because of this it was hard to be "on the same page in terms of what the focus was". She explained that this year they picked a focus in terms of what they were going to examine. She explained that having a common focus, instead of each member focusing on a different aspect, aided the group to communicate well together. She stated, this year

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"We did all picked a focus the focus was the persuasive paragraph and this is what we are going to examine whereas if we all had if we all had different pieces of writing we wouldn't have that focus". She also stated the benefit she saw in the investment and engagement on the part of the members: "If we had someone in the group that was really negative I don't think we would get to where we needed to go". Having a group of people that were engaged and positive about the topic was important, Karla thought, to their ability to function and "get to where we needed to go. When we were given the opportunity to explore as a small group that made all of the difference in the world". Karla believed that in a smaller group they could work together more effectively to allow people time to build shared understanding, focus, and become engaged. She reflected that educators needed time to invest in the group: "I think you need time to invest as well. So, I think if you wanted to get a group going and you had some reluctant people in it I think you would have to give them a little time to invest in the group to see the value in it". Karla believed that along with members needing time to invest, Karla explained her thought that in a larger group it is harder for individuals to agree with the process. She explained her experience in a large group:

> In the larger group there were some people where the whole purpose of their being there was to disagree with the whole process. But here we have all agreed with the process and if you don't agree with the process if you can't start agree on the process then I think it sabotages the whole point of the PLC. So I think you have to come in with some sort of common understanding and then build on that.

A smaller group, coming in to the meeting with a common desire to build shared understanding, and allowing people time to invest, were important for Karla's understanding of communicating and working well together in the PLC.

Karla also commented on the importance of time allocation to the PLC meetings: "We need the time. The time allows us, I think, to be honest. Because all we want here is to better the education of our students and better our teaching". Having the time together "makes it safe. I think that you understand that it is not a personal criticism, it is just a comment. So I think time to build that trust has to be there." Karla understood that time to build trust was essential in their ability to be honest with one another and that being honest with one another was essential in improving their practice.

Karla stated again her belief that without the strong leadership in the school that this way of working together would not be happening: "If we didn't have our principal, we wouldn't be doing this". She also mentioned that it was important for the members to keep the leadership informed: "we have to communicate that to our principal". Communicating what was happening in the group, the new direction they had decided to explore, as well as the positive outcomes with students from their work together in the PLC, was important to Karla's understanding of how to continue to work in this way together.

4.4 Summary

Colleen, Sue, Erica, Noni, Jen, Deb, Bob, Audrey, Kim, Brandon, Jim, and Karla shared their understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision, of what prompted them to work in this way together, what was needed for them to work in this way, as well as specific data about dialogue, good communication, working well together, and building shared vision. The data were studied for themes and these themes will be presented in Chapter 5 as the research findings.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to explore and conceptualize professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue. The research question was: What are professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision in schools? Participants' understandings unfolded from observations as well as focus groups and interview sessions highlighting members' understandings of dialogue.

The data were analyzed using initial, focused, and theoretical coding. Constant comparison was also used in the analysis. The first method of analysis was initial coding (Charmaz, 2006). The data were laid out openly and unanalyzed. The data were read through several times to gain an overall sense of them and capture the complex detail of what the participants said (Creswell, 2007). During initial coding themes were constructed by asking basic questions of the data, such as 'What is this about? Or 'What does this text communicate and how?' (Charmaz, 2006). Using these questions, the data were initially coded with broad themes reflecting what the participants said. In focused coding, the most significant and frequent themes were categorized (Charmaz, 2006). Codes were formulated according to frequency, using researcher observations, focus group, and interview data. Codes were considered significant if alignment was established between the researcher observations and the focus group and interview data. Codes were also considered significant if alignment was established between focus group data and interview data. The categories from focused coding were then grouped together

into theoretical codes with attention to relationships between categories (Charmaz, 2006). The theoretical codes formed the insights in the study's findings.

Through the data analysis, four theoretical codes were found having to do with members' understandings of dialogue: building shared vision, accessing and learning from others' ideas, mindsets enhancing dialogue, and conditions enhancing dialogue. Through the use of constant comparison, comparing data to data, data to category, and category to category, the fifth code, commitment to students, emerged. The focused and theoretical codes, from data analysis in observations, focus groups, and interviews are listed in Table 4.

Table 4

Data Analysis Focused and Theoretical Codes

Focused Codes	Theoretical Codes	
Melding Perspectives Acknowledging Emergent Roles	Building Shared Vision	Constant Comparison Commitment to Students
Developing Broad Fresh New Perspectives Challenging to Modify Thinking	Accessing and Learning from Others Ideas	
Commonality, Coherence, Consistency Attention to What Others Need Functioning as Professionals Ownership Over Practice	Mindsets Enhancing Dialogue	
Systemic Requirements Measurement Requirements	Conditions Enhancing Dialogue	

The theoretical codes make up the study's findings; therefore the data will be presented in this section using the theoretical codes with the focused codes providing detail.

5.1 Building Shared Vision

In the observations, I noticed many common activities, behaviours, interpersonal interactions, and actions among the participants. The PLC meetings typically began with the members discussing the purposes for the meeting and building shared understanding of the processes needed in order to accomplish these purposes. Working from the common goal established by members prior to the meeting, the members each shared their idea of the direction the meeting should take and what each of them wanted to obtain from the time spent together. In other words, the members built shared vision, using multiple perspectives, for the time they were to spend together. Participants started the meeting by asking the other members what they wanted to do today. Some members shared what it was they wanted to accomplish, why they wanted to accomplish it, and how they envisioned doing so. Members who did not share agreed with what the others were saying. In this way the members developed a verbal agenda for the meeting. After building this vision (described below), the members were able to work together from a shared multi-perspective understanding of how the time was to be used. In building shared vision, members melded perspectives and acknowledged emergent roles within their groups.

5.1.1 Melding Perspectives

During the meetings, I observed group members actively using dialogue to build a shared understanding of the topic at hand and from that shared understanding developing a shared vision of ways of doing (activity). Each group did this in a similar way. First, all participants shared their perspectives about the topic. Then, bits and pieces of perspectives were further considered to develop further understanding of each

perspective. Lastly participants translated this shared understanding into a shared vision

(a plan for action).

For example, members shared perspectives around ways in which to create the

conditions for the success of a particular student. Members shared what they knew about

the student, what they had done that works well with the student, and what has not

worked well. One member in particular shared an experience with the student and what

she did to correct the behavior problem. Another member indicated that she had done the

exact same action in her classroom with no success. They realized after challenging each

other to expand and meld together their understandings of the student that the behavior

strategy only worked in the one classroom because that classroom was where the student

had his desk and his 'time out' safe space. They figured out that that particular strategy

only worked if the student had immediate access to the 'time out' space. By sharing their

perspectives, and using dialogue to do so, the group quite quickly came to a shared

understanding of ways to facilitate the success of this particular student. With each of the

shared perspectives, the members formulated a step by step action plan that they would

all adhere to for the student. This plan detailed the shared vision of routine and

consistent action each staff member could take to ensure that each staff member created

the conditions necessary for the student in the school. Participants led me to the

understanding that building shared vision is a process of melding many perspectives into

a shared way of doing and that this melding of perspectives is enhanced with use of

dialogue.

Participants revealed the commonly held view that "dialogue is essential in

building shared vision" and that "building shared vision is impossible without dialogue"

(Focus Group Participant). Members commonly expressed that "without dialogue shared vision doesn't happen" (Interview Participant) and "the only way that you can build shared vision is to have open dialogue" (Focus Group Participant). The way in which members communicated, with the use of dialogue, was essential to their ability to build shared vision from multi-perspective understandings.

5.1.2 Acknowledging Members' Emergent Roles

Members shared their understanding that in building a shared vision, each person had an emergent role in formulating shared understanding whether members are aware of their role or not: "we all have roles that we are not even aware of that just emerge" (Focus group participant). Acknowledging each person's role was necessary because each person's perspective contributed to the group's ability to develop the shared understanding necessary to formulate and carry out a shared vision.

Each person's perspective contributed and blended into "a nice mix" (Focus Group Participant) of perspectives that allowed the group to formulate multiple perspective shared understandings and ways of doing (shared vision). The mix of perspectives was appreciated by this member, because she valued each person's role and contribution in the group. One member expressed her view of the mix of contributions in the group, acknowledging the value she placed on each group member's role: "I honestly wish I could say some of the things you say because everybody is thinking it. I wish I was calm and like a breath of fresh air like some people" (Focus group participant). Members' emergent roles were acknowledged because members valued the contributions of others: "we respect each other's knowledge" (Focus Group Participant). The members shared that through this way of working together they could gain different perspectives

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from different types of personalities: Another member added "We have different personalities. If we were all the same we wouldn't be able to get a great idea and be able to deliver it because it is just going to be the same old same old" (Focus Group Participant).

Members commonly expressed that acknowledging members' emergent roles involved taking turns: "we all got a chance to share our point of view" (Focus Group Participant). One participant in particular shared her understanding of her actions taken to enhance the group's ability to build shared vision. She likened the meetings to "round table discussions" wherein "everyone gets to have the floor" (Interview Participant). She facilitated the building of shared vision by "asking for everyone's input and having them lead the discussion". She took these actions so that "even the quietest person gets time and the person that wants to control the meeting, can't". This allowed each person in the group fair opportunity to express their views, in turn, creating opportunity for each member to have a role in the discussion. Participants led me to the understanding that building shared vision is enhanced with the use of dialogue to meld perspectives and acknowledge members' emergent roles.

5.2 Accessing and Learning from Others' Ideas in Dialogue

The second theoretical code was accessing and learning from others' ideas in dialogue. Participants revealed the common understanding that members use dialogue because "dialogue lets you have accessibility to other peoples' ideas" (Interview Participant). Participants understood that dialogue aided them to access each other's ideas and this access was seen as a way in which to learn from each other. When asked how they go about building shared vision, educators shared their understanding: "Everyone

builds on each other's ideas. It doesn't just stop with one idea. Someone will come up with an idea and everyone will add to it" (Focus Group Participant). Members led me to the understanding that dialogue is used to build shared vision because members recognize that access to others' ideas aids members in learning from one another.

5.2.1 Developing Broad, Fresh, and New Perspectives

Members understood that accessing and learning from others' ideas led them to developing broad fresh and new perspectives. One member expressed that the learning she did with her group helped her to gain, "new, and fresh perspectives" (Focus Group Participant).

In the observations, I noticed members were generally inclined to broaden ideas in communication in order to fully understand complex situations or topics. Members engaged in dialogical processes, such as listening, inquiry and reflection, and suspension of judgment in order to broaden ideas and understanding. For example, the group working on developing writing criteria spent a considerable amount of time developing the criteria in relation to the learning outcomes in the government prescribed curriculum. After formulating the criteria and developing a rubric in which to use in the classroom, multiple ideas about how to broaden the criteria and extend their rubric by relating the criteria were considered.

The communication became very complex at this point and members were willing to open their understanding to each other's ideas. After building shared understanding of this broadened concept, members began to deduce and come back around to their initial purpose. The group continued to consider the broadened idea by formulating shared understanding of the broadened idea, considering if they have deviated from their main

purpose. The group discussed their broadened understanding by relating what and how this understanding would benefit students.

The group decided from this meeting that they would work on differentiating the criteria and the rubrics they were producing according to grade level expectations in the government curricula. They decided that this way of doing would simplify and make more precise the complex situation of developing writing criteria and rubrics for students. Broadening perspectives in this way led to a fuller understanding of how the concept could be 'tweaked' to serve students more effectively. Members then formulated the broadened idea of differentiating according to grade level into a shared vision of action and decided to develop grade level writing criteria rubrics. Broadening perspectives allowed participants to build shared vision from multi-perspective understandings.

In the focus groups and interviews, members explained how they gained broadened perspectives through accessing and learning from each other's ideas. One member, for example, explained this broadened perspective as "see[ing] the forest for the trees" (Focus Group Participant). Members, through the use of dialogue, gained a broad perspective of the whole (the forest). Rather than simply paying attention to narrow perspectives (the trees), members used each other in dialogue to gain a sense of the whole. One member further explained "instead of having this narrow pinpoint of an idea you're now expanding it". The members commonly noticed that their view of a topic went from a narrow view and expanded into a more broad view of the issue. The members felt that obtaining a view of the whole picture (the forest) allowed them to "realize what [they] could do better".

In focus groups and interviews, participants conveyed the commonly held view that dialogue is required in broadening ideas in order to gain new and fresh perspectives. Learning from each other by incorporating others' ideas, participants indicated, is a process of incorporating "new perspective or fresh perspective" into one's own view. Participants commonly understood that through sharing multiple perspectives, they gained a new, fresh way of looking at a situation. This way of working together enabled the educators to add to their perspectives or adjust their perspectives. Having the opportunity to add to and adjust one's perspectives was appreciated by the participants:

> I really appreciate it. It is almost like a think aloud when we go around and share how we analyze things and how we look at things because I get information from everyone that is slightly different, I get a new way of looking at a situation (Focus Group Participant).

The participants valued this "new way of looking at a situation" they obtained from each other and saw it as a way in which to gain a broader perspective of any given situation. One participant likened this new understanding using an analogy of an island: "I love the independence part of teaching. In my room it is my environment and I can create whatever." (Focus Group Participant). The participant then expressed that he did not want to be an island and acknowledged that because of this opportunity to dialogue, "I am not an island anymore" (Focus Group Participant). Participants indicated that instead of always working in isolation, members came together to dialogue and form shared understanding. Participants understood that they worked in this way together because they wanted to gain new, different, and/or fresh perspectives from each other. Participants led me to the understanding that the use of dialogue supports educators' ability to learn from one another because dialogue aids educators to access others' ideas for broad, new, and fresh perspectives.

5.2.2 Challenging to Modify Thinking

Members understood that working together to access and learn from others' ideas challenged them to modify their thinking.   In the focus groups and interviews, participants shared the common understanding that dialogue aids educators to modify their thinking through the incorporation of others' ideas. One member described how his thinking was modified by the incorporation of "new and fresh perspectives" he had gained from suggestions made by fellow educators in his group:

> I realize what you can do better. When we talk I re-evaluate what I think. I've tried to modify my thinking and it is making me more open minded…So now I am trying to incorporate that. I'm trying to with a new perspective or a fresh perspective….I just didn't even realize it or think about it in those terms (Focus Group Participant).

Participants explained this way of working together allowed them an opportunity to modify thinking, change their mind about a topic, and/or adjust their thinking:

> I like the ability to say I was thinking this but now I am changing my mind a little bit to this. I think that is really good to adjust what I think based on new insights or a different perspective (Focus Group Participant).

Adding to and adjusting perspectives was viewed as a way in which to challenge oneself to "take in people's views" (Interview Participant). One member explained this understanding very well. This challenge was viewed as necessary for new and/or holistic understandings to emerge in dialogue:

> You are not just challenging other people you are challenging yourself with everybody else's answers. You have to say okay maybe my view is not the only right view. I mean people change all the time and the system has changed so much and has it ever been right? No, so what makes this way right? You always have to be willing to change and adapt and take in peoples' views (Interview Participant).

Participants led me to the understanding that dialogue provides access to others' ideas; enhancing learning through developing broad perspectives and modifying thinking.

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5.3 Mindsets Enhancing Dialogue

The third theoretical code was mindsets for enhancing dialogue. During the observations, I noticed participants using dialogue to create consistent ways of working together. I also noticed what seemed to be a deep awareness of what was needed in order to employ dialogue. Participants seemed to have a highly developed sense of what others need. This sense of what others need was interconnected with the participants' understandings of the importance of professionalism and educator ownership over practice. Participants led me to the understanding that dialogical communication is enhanced with four mindsets: desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency; a keen attention to what others need; a strong desire to function as professionals; and educator ownership over practice.

5.3.1 Desire for Commonality, Cohesion, and Consistency

During the focus groups and interviews, participants conveyed their understanding that they use dialogue because of their desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency in their practice. The group working on building shared vision around ways to facilitate the success of a student in the school believed that consistency would enhance the student's success. Members viewed consistency as communicating with the same vocabulary to formulate common expectations and procedures. Participants explained that using the same vocabulary created consistency. Creating this commonality and consistency was "something we wanted to do as a whole. We communicated with the same vocabulary and it does help students" (Focus Group Participant). A desire for consistency allowed the members to develop common vocabulary for use with the students and formulate common expectations and procedures.

The group developing writing standards paragraph rubrics, also explained that they were using dialogue to build shared vision to gain commonality and consistency in writing expectations and assessment practices. The group was able to get "closer and closer in the way [they] were looking at things" (Focus Group Participant). One member shared her view of the process of building shared vision for consistency and the role dialogue played in the process:

> As the process continued we got closer and closer in the way we were looking at things. If you went into any other school you would have that variance, but through this dialogue you bring it closer together and that would address any inconsistency (Focus Group Participant).

Both groups indicated common language and common expectations as being central to their ability to work well together for their students. The members worked in this way because they viewed themselves as "a progressive group try[ing] to build common knowledge" (Focus Group Participant). When explaining this understanding further, members expressed the desire "to be on the same page. We are consistent and we make sure we are all on the same page" (Focus Group Participant). Members further explained: "We may not always be on the same page but we are in the same direction for the same purpose" and clarified their understanding that the "same page" did not necessarily mean that everyone thought in the same way, but that:

> as individuals we are going to be different, but generally speaking there is a real direction that is being created here. We may not always be on the same page, but we are in the same direction for the same purpose (Focus Group Participant).

Members commonly understood that when they shared perspectives they became more unified: "we accomplished way more today. I mean we are just way more streamlined and efficient. More uniform. I think we were more unified" (Focus Group Participant). Another member added to this understanding one word summing this

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idea—"cohesion" (Focus Group Participant). With this word, the member explained her understanding further:

> Yes, cohesion. That has fired a lot more. To me it is the collegiality and sort of moving scaffolding up to bigger and better things. I know that is a simplistic way of explaining it, but there are more important things that we need to be examining. So we have been able to get that because of our communication (Focus Group Participant).

The members understood that functioning in a cohesive way for students made their practice stronger: "just made it more powerful, that consistency" (Focus Group Participant).

Increased cohesion participants agreed produced a more consistent experience for students. The actions taken by members to formulate consistent ways of being and doing for students reflects high value members place on consistency. They valued this consistency because, as members expressed, "it is better for students" (Focus Group Participant). Building shared understanding to produce "common language and common expectations" was seen as a way in which to "level the playing field for students" (Focus group Participant). One member proclaimed "I think it is powerful when we all use the same language". Members commonly expressed that with their ability to create and maintain consistency students' benefit. By producing and using shared language and expectations, students are able to see the connections between classes and teachers. Students know what to expect because each teacher is working from a shared vision. By creating common threads throughout the school and between schools, the members understood that students gain from the commonalities and consistency created through their formulation of shared understanding and vision.

Members explained this understanding further, indicating that their consistency not only benefits students, but teachers, parents, and communities as a whole. One member explained: "if everyone is more consistent the parents would have a better understanding of what the expectations were and it would sort of ease that sort of miscommunication" (Focus Group Participant). Participants explained that if teachers used common language, common expectations, and common criteria and assessment practices across grades and schools, parents would better understand expectations and be more able to engage in communications about the school and their child if consistent methods were used across the board. As one member explained: "The value is just the fact that we knew that all of these students in these schools were doing the exact same things and the fact that they all knew that was just amazing" (Focus Group Participant).

One member explained, "I think if we become consistent with our language and how we are evaluating when we have those discussions with parents it would benefit them in understanding us as a community of teachers" (Focus Group Participant). Members led me to understand that they communicate in a dialogical manner because of their desire for commonality and consistency with each other and within their classrooms and schools. Participants led me to the understanding that this desire to formulate common, cohesive, and consistent ways of doing was needed for their ability to communicate in a dialogical manner.

5.3.2 Attention to What Others Need

During the observations, I noticed that members seemed to have a keen sense of what others need in communication. One observation is detailed below as an example of what I observed to be a highly developed sense of what others need. A member, attempting to have her point of view incorporated into shared understanding and ways of doing was interrupted quite often by another member of the group. In the first session she voiced her point of view and it was not incorporated because, it seemed, members were not ready and did not have enough personal understanding of what it was she was proposing, convalescing in the view being acknowledged but not incorporated into shared understanding or vision. During the meeting, the member was continually interrupted and the topic of discussion was continually moved in another direction. The member did not seem to become impatient or force her view on the group, but seemed to listen, suspend, inquire, incorporate tensions into her understanding, and verbally reflected on experience. It seemed that this member had an awareness of some sort that she needed to allow members to go through the processes they needed to go through to understand what it was she was trying to say. The first group meeting ended with no definitive indication that her point was understood by the group and no incorporation of her view into the whole groups' understanding.

During the focus groups and interviews, most participants commonly understood that they strive to attend to what they believe others need in communication. The member from the observation above explained that she tried to pay attention to what others need because of the respect she felt for the teaching profession and her realization that people need to be allowed to " process and make connections between their own experiences and

other peoples' ideas" before these ideas could be understood. She explained that this realization made her not mind being interrupted.

She explained that in that particular communication she "decided to sit back and wait for a time" to bring the discussion back when they group would be "more ready to understand and share the ideas". She further explained that she tried to share her ideas where she thought they would fit and be understood by the other members. She sat back and waited for an appropriate time to insert her ideas where she felt they fit in what others where communicating. She realized that people needed an opportunity to process and relate others' ideas to their own experiences. She also realized that in order to be understood she needed to insert her ideas at appropriate times (when she felt they were more likely to be understood). These realizations reveal a keen sense of what others needed to build shared understanding in communication.

Another participant's understanding is detailed below. The member admitted in an interview that sometimes in communication "I am thinking to myself, can you believe what that person just said or did?" The member shared that she "doesn't overreact" and she does not act on these thoughts because she has a deep sense of what others need in the communication. She further explained that she understands that people go about learning in different ways and if a person is expressing an idea or opinion that she questions or begins to judge she reminds herself that this may just be how the member of the group needs to express in order to understand and formulate shared understanding. This indicates to me an acute sense of self, and an acute sense of what others need. When further questioned about what is needed in dialogical communications the participant shared her understanding further: "We as educators understand that our students process

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information and build understanding in many different ways. As educators we try to

accommodate many different types of intelligence. Why wouldn't we function in the

same way with each other?" (Interview Participant).

During the focus groups and interviews, participants led me to the understanding

that members in dialogue employ a highly developed sense of what others need in

communication. One member explained what he saw another member doing: "I think that

Audrey realized that the teachers needed her information to be re-framed, and they had to

be given time to mull things over, before being ready to listen and accept what she was

presenting" (Interview Participant). Members commonly understood that in order to be

understood or have their vision incorporated into the whole, they needed to re-frame what

it was they were saying and/or give people time to understand.

Participants also shared their understanding that part of paying attention to what

others need was members who "go beyond listening" (Interview Participant). Members

commonly understood that listening in a dialogical manner goes beyond listening to

produce action in the groups and the schools. One member indicated that she made sure

to take what members had said in the dialogue and apply the ideas to ways of doing in the

school. For example, members discussed making changes to the assessment rubric and

discussed particular ways in which the rubric would change to reflect what had been said

in the meeting. At the next meeting a draft of the new rubric was presented. She termed

this going beyond listening because members could "see what they have said

incorporated what is happening" in the group or school. Participants led me to the

understanding that keen attention to what others need enhances dialogical

communication.

5.3.3 Desire to Function as Professionals

In the focus groups and interviews, participants indicated that they communicate in a dialogical manner because of their desire to function as professionals. When asked what prompted them to work with consistency and commonality, participants indicated that it was their professional obligation: "we owe it to ourselves as professionals" (Focus Group Participant).

Members shared the understanding that using dialogue enabled them to come together as a consistent team working from shared vision of action: "so the closer we can come together with our evidence and with our support and with one another it is strength in numbers. We are a team saying this is what we are doing and this is why" (Observation Participant). Explaining this further, one member stated "We owe it to ourselves and our students that there is that consistency going on" (Focus Group Participant).

Participants led me to the understanding that desire to function as a professional enhances ability to communicate in a dialogical manner.

5.3.4 Allowing for Ownership over Practice

During the observations, I noticed that members seemed to allow each other ownership over practice by not pushing each other to agree, make decisions, or come to a consensus, but by allowing each other to maintain their own views and ways of doing in their practice. I observed one group, for example, faced with tensions in the communication due to attempting to build shared vision around using a standardized editing tool in all classrooms. All members did not agree to use the tool because they had their own system for editing, or they did not see how the tool could be used in their particular context. Members allowed for opportunity to enhance their ability to build

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shared vision by allowing for ownership over practice. One member suggested that they leave the topic for the time being and re-evaluate the issues at a later date. She suggested that they "hold off on the conversation because we need some time to digest it" (Observation participant). Rather than passing over or ignoring tense complex issues members acknowledged the need for further consideration and instead of members pushing their views on each other, they decided to add the item to the next meeting's agenda for further consideration at the next meeting. In tense complex communications, it seemed that members, instead of pushing points of view on each other, allow each other to maintain ownership over practice.

In focus groups and interviews, the members commonly conveyed the understanding that giving people time to "digest" information, and consider the other points of view was foundational in their ability to communicate well together. One member shared that when she suggested the group take time to "digest" she was "not trying to shut down the communication, but enhance it" (Interview Participant). By giving people time to "digest" and planning to return to the topic in the next meeting, members displayed an understanding that educator ownership over practice was foundational in developing the ability to communicate well together. Members conveyed the understanding that pushing views for consensus or decision making could not contribute to building shared vision and that allowing for ownership over practice set the stage for the dialogical communications required to build shared vision.

Members also conveyed that being able to make decisions in the content and direction of their meetings was important for their ability to have ownership over practice. In observation, members questioned if they were allowed to change directions

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and move from the original purpose of the meeting: "I think we need to, can we re-direct a little bit more?"…"are we allowed to?" (Focus Group Participants). The common reply was that the new direction needed to be explored because it was the next step "natural progression" (Focus Group Participant) of the learning they had done together. Being able to change purpose and direction of the meetings was essential to their feeling of ownership over practice and was important in their ability to communicate in a dialogical manner

Members commonly understood that ability to re-direct and go in new directions together in order to continue their learning and continue communicating in a dialogical manner was "the foundation of our teaching. The kicker" (Focus Group Participant). It was further explained that the ability to move in the directions the group felt they needed was necessary in order for the group to not "ground to a halt" (Focus Group Participant). One member shared a previous experience wherein his PLC "ground to a halt" because they did not take the necessary steps needed to continue their learning together. The member shared that not having ownership over the content and direction of the meetings thwarted their ability to continue to learn together, and compared that experience to the present PLC. The members in the present PLC had ownership of their practice which allowed them to decide on the direction of learning. Changing or re-directing the content and direction of the meeting was seen as a natural evolution of their work together. Participants led me to the understanding that dialogical communication is enhanced with the mindsets: desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency; keen attention to what others need; a desire to function as professionals; and ownership over practice.

5.4 Conditions Enhancing Dialogue

The fourth theoretical code was conditions enhancing dialogue. In focus groups and interviews the participants were asked what was needed in order for them to communicate in a dialogical manner. Members commonly conveyed three systemic supports and one pedagogical support.

5.4.1 Systemic Supports Enhancing Dialogue

Members commonly indicated three systemic supports for communicating in a dialogical manner: professional learning community, time, and administrative support. In the focus groups and interviews members conveyed their understanding that the support of school administration in the form of the formalized Professional Learning Community was important in their ability to dialogue. The PLC was structured and supported by administration in this school for the educators for the purpose of learning from one another. Members expressed the differences they noticed in working with a PLC as opposed to without a PLC: "Up until last year we didn't have a PLC, so there wasn't much dialogue" (Focus Group Participant). Without a PLC, members felt that dialogue would not happen. The PLC was seen as a structural component in schools that supports educators "wanting to get together, have dialogues, and have better learning experiences, and create knowledge for themselves" (Interview Participant). "Without the PLC there might be no conversation. [With the PLC] there are conversations with people I wouldn't talk to usually" (Focus Group Participant). Having the structured PLC allowed members to communicate in a dialogical manner.

Time was the second systemic support: "I think the component of time is always big" (Focus Group Participant). Members conveyed the understanding that "if we didn't

have the time this would never happen" (Focus Group Participant). Dialogical

communications that "change your perspective a little bit" would not happen "if we were

rushed" (Focus Group Participant). Members agreed that having the uninterrupted

release time "not having to answer the phone, not having anyone knocking on the door"

was necessary in order for them to communicate in this way together. "If we didn't have

the time we would cut everything short……knowing your class is covered that is key"

(Focus Group Participant).   Members understood that having the structured time, without

interruption, allowed them to work in this way together.

Administrative support was the third systemic support. Members expressed that

"administration has to be on board" and that sharing the benefits of working in this way

together in the PLC is necessary for continued systemic support: "I think sometimes that

the administrators that are not involved in this, don't really know what is happening" and

"expressing to our principal the benefits of doing this" is necessary for continued support.

Participants led me to the understanding that the formalization of the PLC, uninterrupted

time, and administrative support enhanced dialogical communication in schools.

5.4.2 Pedagogical Support Enhancing Dialogue

Member indicated that having measurable outcomes provided through the use of

the rubric enhanced dialogue. Members understood that having a common pedagogical

tool to work with in the PLC allowing members to have a common focus enhanced their

ability to communicate in a dialogical manner: "we have a commonality with the

rubrics". The common tool (rubric) was seen as the "basis of the discussion…[the rubric]

is what we have in common and it is built right into the conversation" (Focus Group

Participant). The members understood this common tool to be a commonality that

enhanced their ability to communicate. The rubric was viewed as a tool that initiated and

sustained dialogical communication because and provided members with a common tool

to work with. From the common tool, members reflected, they were able to "scaffold to

bigger and better things" (Interview Participant).

Having the common tool "brought us closer together as colleagues because we

can now share and talk about common outcomes and indicators. It opens up the dialogue

between and among the student and different teachers. The rubric has been the stabilizer

for us as teachers" (Interview Participant). The rubric provided the members with a

common tool to enhance the communication because the measurement tool provided

them with a common ground for communication. Members conveyed that creating and

using measurable outcomes from time spent working together was foundational to their

ability to continue to communicate in a dialogical manner together. In the focus groups

and interviews members commonly conveyed the understanding that having outcomes

(provided in the rubric) and assessing themselves with these outcomes aided their ability

to communicate.

Members indicated that they were motivated by seeing the students' success as

measured by the rubric and this in turn motivated the educators to continue to work in a

dialogical manner. Being able to concretely measure the students' success with the

rubrics, in turn, allowed the educators to see the success of their efforts in the time spent

together in dialogical communication. Use of measurable outcomes enhances the ability

to communicate in a dialogical manner. Members led me to the understanding that there

are two conditions enhancing dialogue: systemic support and measurable outcomes.

5.5 Commitment to Students

With the use of constant comparison, wherein the codes are compared and connected to add the researcher's ability to portray the whole picture (Charmaz, 2006), I found one connection embedded within each code. All of the codes are bound by the educators' high levels of commitment to their students. A highly developed commitment to students was prevalent in all of the communication during the observations, focus groups, and interviews.

During the observations the members continually referred to and compared what they were doing together back to the students. Nearly everything discussed during the meetings was in reference to and driven by the members overriding purpose of working well together for students. Often members would interject with statements, such as "how does this help the students?" Guiding these educators was the main question "will the students benefit from this?" (Focus Group Participant). The members often gauged discussion and action according to this question.

When asked what prompted them to work in this way together, members consistently understood that they work in this way together because of their high levels of commitment to serving their students well. Participants expressed that the underlying purpose to their work of building shared vision and using dialogue to do so was their commitment to students and their concern with creating conditions for themselves to work well together for students. Participants commonly expressed that they use dialogue because "the focus is all about the students. It is all about how we can make changes for the students" (Interview Participant). Participants expressed this concern repeatedly:

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"Everyone of us is here for the students. Our focus is the students. Our investment is in the student. It is all about the students." (Focus Group Participant).

One focus group participant explained "all we want is to here is to better the education of our students and better our teaching. This makes it safe. I think that you understand that is not a personal criticism it is just a comment" (Focus Group Participant). Because of members' high levels of commitment to students, members understood that during communications members were not criticizing, but commenting in order to better the education of students and better teaching.

Members consistently expressed that when interrupted, challenged, or when their view was not incorporated into the whole, it is their "commitment to students" that enabled them to use dialogic components to communicate. One member expressed that because of his commitment to students "I'm willing to change and look at things differently and I'm okay with that" (Interview Participant). The participants used the dialogical components discussed above in order to fulfilling their commitment to students.

Ability to build shared vision, access and learn from each other, employ mindsets enhancing dialogue, and create conditions enhancing dialogue, were all ways of working together that stemmed from the members highly developed commitment to serving their students well. Participants worked in this way together because of their highly developed commitment to students and this commitment enhanced dialogical communication. Participants led me to the understanding that a highly developed commitment to students enhances dialogical communication in schools.

5.6 Summary

In observations, focus groups, and interviews, four consistent codes emerged having to do with members' understandings of dialogue: building shared vision, accessing and learning from others' ideas, mindsets enhancing dialogue, and conditions enhancing dialogue. Within each, through the use of constant comparison the fifth code emerged having to do with commitment to students.

Members led me to the understanding that:

1. Building shared vision requires dialogue to meld perspectives and acknowledge group member emergent roles.

2. Dialogue provides access to others' ideas; enhancing learning through developing broad perspectives and modifying thinking.

3. Mindsets enhancing dialogue are: desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency; keen attention to what others need; a desire to function as professionals; and ownership over practice.

4. Two conditions enhancing dialogue are: systemic support and measurable outcomes.

5. A highly developed commitment to students enhances dialogical communication in schools.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore and conceptualize professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue. The research question was: What are professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision in schools? The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education recommends that leaders in schools use dialogue to promote constructivist ways of doing in schools, including building shared vision (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008). A review of the literature in Chapter 2 revealed that although dialogue is theoretically proposed as a process to enhance ways of working together, lacking in this literature was evidence from the field on how dialogue actually works in schools to enhance constructivist ways of doing to produce shared vision.

Constructions of meaning from teacher and leader understandings of dialogue and the complexities involved in communication provided data from the field regarding how dialogue works in practice to enhance constructivist ways of doing, particularly building shared vision, in schools. This investigation contributed to theories and added evidence from the field on how dialogue can be used in practice to build constructivist ways of doing and develop shared vision in educational organizations.

6.1 Overview of the Findings

Along with what is already theoretically known about dialogue, the findings from this study provide evidence from the field about how dialogue actually works in practice in schools. The data from the study revealed five themes having to do with members' understandings of dialogue: melding perspectives and acknowledging emergent roles,

accessing and learning from others' ideas, mindsets enhancing dialogue, conditions enhancing dialogue, and commitment to students. The first theme reveals that building shared vision requires dialogue to meld perspectives and acknowledge group member emergent roles. The second theme signifies that dialogue provides access to others' ideas; enhancing learning through developing broad perspectives and modifying thinking. The third theme denotes four mindsets that enhance dialogue: desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency, keen attention to what others need, a desire to function as professionals, and ownership practice. The fourth theme provides evidence that two conditions enhance dialogue: systemic support and measurable outcomes. The fifth theme reveals that a highly developed commitment to students enhances dialogical communication.

6.2 Discussion

The guiding question for this instrumental case study was: What are professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision in schools? The following paragraphs provide a discussion of those understandings and compare those understandings to the literature in Chapter 2.

Existing theoretical philosophies and components of dialogue (discussed in Chapter 2) were observed and discussed in the focus groups and interviews. Participants, when building shared vision, held tensions in view (tensionality) (Stewart, et al., 2004), worked from a clear purpose (intentionality) (Bohm, 1996), suspended judgment, listened, and used inquiry and reflection (Bohm, 1996), when communicating. An exploration of participants' understandings in this study revealed that, in addition to existing theory, five catalytic components enhance the use of dialogue in schools.

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6.2.1 Melding Perspectives and Acknowledging Emergent Roles

The first theme was the following: Building shared vision is a process that requires the use of dialogue to meld perspectives and acknowledge group member emergent roles. Participants in this study seemed to inherently work in a dialogical manner. Although they did not explicitly state that this way of working together was connected to a shift in philosophical assumptions due to a recognition that holistic approaches are better suited for 21st century students (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001), participants' comments indicated gains to practice due to working in a dialogical way. Participants' understandings of dialogue parallel what is theoretically known about dialogue. Participants worked together in a way that reflected an understanding that working together to formulate shared ways of doing in education is preferable over working in isolation. This understanding relates to conceptual arguments in the literature that recommend dialogue be used to shift from a mechanistic tendency to frame issues using one or two perspectives to a holistic approach where issue are framed using multiple perspectives (Bohm, 1980, 1996; Linder, 2001). The participants worked together in a holistic habit of mind (Linder, 2001); tending to frame issues as a totality: broadly, rather than narrowly, with the use of multiple perspectives (Stewart et al., 2004). The participants' indication that melding perspectives and acknowledging roles in communication reveals their understanding that working in a holistic habit of mind aids professional practice in schools.

Schools are complex systems and the participants in this study seemed to understand what is theoretically proposed in the literature that dialogue creates and maintains holistic assumptions more appropriate for complex systems (Bohm, 1980,

1996; Cissna & Anderson, 2002; Goodall & Kellett, 2004; Linder, 2001). Participants worked to formulate multi-perspective shared vision, which is viewed as necessary for the effective functioning of today's organization (Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 1999). As participants engaged in PLC meetings, it was apparent that there is a "wholeness" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001) in education. Participants working in a dialogical manner, reflects an understanding that using only one or two perspectives to inform way of doing in education is not sufficient (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). There are many best ways, and dialogue was used, as Shields and Edwards (2005) recommended, to access the multiple perspectives needed in complex and diverse school populations.

Participants reflected a "wholeness view" when building shared vision by using dialogue to meld perspectives and acknowledge members' emergent roles. In theory, building shared vision is a collaborative "process of negotiation among multiple people with different knowledge bases, histories, hopes and aspirations, personal styles and emotions, desires and needs" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000, p. 4). Participants upheld the theoretical concept that dialogue is the preferred method of communication when building shared understanding leading to shared vision (Senge, 1990; Mitchell & Sackney, 2000; Wheatley, 1999). Theoretically, dialogue allows for multiple perspectives to be incorporated into shared visions of ways of doing in schools. The shared understanding created through dialogue enhanced the ability of people to work well together, because the deliberate use of dialogue and its components ensured, what Bohm (1996) explained as, multiple perspectives creating shared constructions of understanding.

Communicating in such a way enabled the groups to pull together multiple perspectives into shared understandings (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001). Pulling together these multiple perspective required members to meld perspectives from members' multiple understandings. Participants melded what the other group members perceived into their own understanding. The participants achieved shared understanding when "the valid identities of multiple voices" (Cissna & Anderson, 2002, p. 227) were acknowledged and melded together through gathering understanding from many parts/perspectives, as opposed to from only one or two perspectives.

Participants' use of dialogue supports existing literature concerning the benefits of dialogue as a way in which to gain multiple views and understanding through creating shared understanding from many understandings, as opposed to gaining agreement on one or two understandings (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Senge, 2000). Dialogue was revealed as a structure that de-homogenizes understanding. Dialogue was not used as a way in which to commensurate views. Melding perspectives in dialogue meant collating perspectives, rather than homogenizing views. Participants' acknowledgement of each members role, provided each participant a voice, and participants' melding provided a space wherein each voice informed the construction of understanding. By collating perspectives, the participants acknowledged each view and melded each view into the whole, and in turn created multi-perspective shared understanding used to inform shared ways of doing in the school.

Part of the members' ability to meld perspectives was the process of acknowledging member emergent roles in the communications. Each person had an emergent role in formulating shared understanding: "we all have roles that we are not

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even aware of that just emerge" (Focus group participant). Each person was given the opportunity to express their views. Acknowledging each person's role was necessary because each person's perspective contributed to the group's ability to develop the shared understanding necessary to formulate and carry out a shared vision. As revealed by the group working together to create the conditions for the success of the student, for example, the members, by making room for each member's role in sharing their perspectives and melding these perspectives, came to a shared understanding of ways to facilitate the student's success. The participants reached greater understanding and shared vision by acknowledging each members emergent role and melding bits and pieces of each member's perspective into a shared picture of the whole. This finding supports the existing theoretical literature cited above and adds new evidence from the field that about how dialogue actually works in schools. Melding perspectives and acknowledging emergent roles are integral parts of dialogic communication and catalysts for the use of dialogue in schools.

6.2.2 Accessing and Learning from Others' Ideas

The second theme was the following: Dialogue provides access to others' ideas; enhancing learning through developing broad perspectives and modifying thinking. The participants revealed that dialogue is used to build shared vision because members recognize that access to others' ideas aids members in learning from one another through developing broad, new perspectives, and modifying thinking. Participants learned from each other and this learning was caused by dialogic communication that provided them with broad, fresh, and new perspectives. These perspectives, participants felt, caused

their thinking to be modified and due to this modified thinking, participants felt that learning had taken place.

Dialogue was used as a way in which to access each other's ideas in order to learn from one another. This finding indicates that dialogue allows for and is essential in constructivist learning. A constructivist epistemology entails that philosophically one believes understanding is created socially, rather than individually (Driscoll, 2000). The participants were aware that participating in the PLC meetings and using dialogue as the mode of communication would enhance their understanding and add to their ability to learn and develop professionally. The participants worked together to gain understanding from one another.

As Driscoll (2000) indicated, understanding is formed through new experiences found in social interactions that conflict with previously established understandings. As educators interacted with each other in this study, sharing ideas, adding to previously established understandings, and thinking together, their understanding increased (Lambert, et al., 2002). The learning participants gained from one another was caused by dialogic communication that provided them with broad, fresh, and new perspectives. These perspectives, participants felt, caused their thinking to be modified. Dialogue is, therefore, an integral part of constructivist learning. This finding supports the existing theoretical literature and adds new evidence from the field that about how dialogue actually works in schools. Accessing and learning from others' ideas is an integral part of dialogic communication and a catalyst for the use of dialogue in schools.

6.2.3 Mindsets Enhancing Dialogue

The third theme was the following: There are four mindsets that enhance dialogical communication: desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency; keen attention to what others need; a desire to function as professionals; and ownership over practice.

Participants in this study had a strong desire to build commonality, cohesion and consistency, with each other. Participants saw the value of framing issues in a common way (Schien, 2003) and took this idea a step further to frame their practice in common ways. The participants indicated that working together to develop common ways to deal with student behavior or to assess students, revealed a strong desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency.

Members commonly understood that when they shared perspectives they became more "unified" (Focus Group Participant) in the way that they were thinking about their practice. The participants wanted to become more consistent in ways of doing in their practice, because they believed that this consistency was better for students and better for themselves as professionals. They strove to build common ways of doing because they believed that having these common ways would improve their practice and, in turn, enhance student success. Working together to create common, cohesive, and consistent ways of doing was an important element to being able to communicate well together.

Data from this study provides evidence from the field that supports Bohm's (1996) theoretical philosophies about dialogue contributing to ability to form collective conscious and coherent shared understanding. Bohm (1996) suggested that formulation of collective conscious is built and sustained through dialogue, and allows people to form

broader, coherent understanding. Collective conscious, Bohm (1996) explained, provides a cohesive view of reality and is formed when multiple perspectives inform the view. Collective conscious was reached through the members' desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency. This desire enabled the members to form multiple perspective shared understanding.

The way in which the participants described how they worked together (with this desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency) relates directly to what Bohm (1980) theorized as "energy of coherence" (p. 22). Members recognized this desire within themselves and the group as a whole. Participants created this "energy of coherence" when all parts (members) worked together to form cohesive whole understanding. Members recognized that they had reached a state of cohesion when parts merged together and relationships between entities were recognized to formulate understanding that holds the whole picture. Because of the desire for commonality, both groups used multiple perspectives to form a common, cohesive, and consistent view of ways to serve students well. This finding supports the existing theoretical literature and adds new evidence from the field about how dialogue actually works in schools. Desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency is an integral part of dialogic communication and a catalyst for the use of dialogue in schools.

The study also revealed that a keen attention to what others need was also necessary for dialogic communication. Participants commonly understood that in communication they strive to attend to what they believe others need in the communication. When working in a "wholeness view" (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001) of education, the participants provided each other opportunities to construct holistic

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understanding by paying close attention to each other. Participants indicated that they pay close attention to what they think others need to build shared understanding. Formulating shared understanding in this way reflects what Mitchell and Sackney (2001) theorized as the "new educational order": an emergence of holistic ways of working together in schools. This finding also takes this theory a step further by adding new evidence from the field that reveals that working in wholeness in a "new educational order" is dependent on people's inclination to pay attention to and provide people with what they think is needed in building shared understanding.

Participants understood that certain considerations need to be employed when attempting to build shared understanding. Participants indicated that they understood that others need them to: allow people to "process and make connections between their own experiences and other peoples' ideas" (Interview Participant) before ideas could be understood; understand that people go about learning in different ways; insert ideas into the communication at appropriate times (when they are more likely to be understood); and re-frame ideas in order to be understood. Participants had a keen sense of when to employ each of these considerations and indicated that this keen sense was fostered by paying close attention to what they believed others needed at any given time. Going "beyond listening" (Interview Participant) was also revealed as a keen attention to what others need. Beyond listening was described as actual incorporation of communication into ways of doing (actions taken) in the school. Part of having a keen sense of what others need in communication was described as "going beyond listening" to incorporate what has been said into ways of doing in schools.

Kelleet (2004) theorized that the aim of dialogue is producing "a deepened sense of connection between one's self and others" (p. 167). In dialogue shared understanding is reached through this deepened connection (Kelleet, 2004). The finding from this study adds to this theory of connection and takes it a step further by adding evidence from the field that reveals that part of creating this deepened sense of connection is people's ability to attend to what others need in communication. Working in wholeness in a "new educational order" with a deepened sense of connection is dependent on people's inclination to pay attention to and provide people with what they think is needed in building shared understanding. The finding from this study adds to the literature and takes it a step further by adding new evidence from the field that reveals that dialogical communication is dependent on members possessing and employing keen attention to what others need. Keen attention to what others need is an integral part of dialogic communication and a catalyst for the use of dialogue in schools.

The study also revealed that a desire to function as professionals is required for dialogical communication in schools. PLC members commonly understood that they communicate in this way together because of their desire to function as professionals. A challenge in PLCs is to develop atmospheres in which people can work well enough together to develop shared understanding (Dufour, Dufour & Eaker, 2005). The members in this study developed the atmosphere to work well together through their shared desire to function as professionals. Members explained professionalism as having a high regard for their work and each other, and working to serve their students as well as possible. The members attributed the way they work together well to their shared desire

to function as professionals. This desire created the atmosphere in which they could work well together.

Using dialogue enabled members to come together as a consistent team working together to build shared understanding. Participants worked in this way together because they felt it was their professional obligation. The members "shared in the leadership responsibility for acting coherently towards the whole" (Bohm, 1996, p. 35). Acting coherently towards the whole reflects the participants' sense of responsibility, duty, and obligation towards their profession. Professionalism, to the participants, meant that they came together to create cohesive, common, and consistent ways of serving their students well. They understood that in this coming together for students the more they communicated well together by melding perspectives, acknowledging emergent roles, accessing and learning from others ideas, and employing mindsets to formulate shared understanding, the more they would perceive themselves and be perceived as professionals.

Working in a dialogical manner was also reflective of the members' high capacity for communication. Communication is an organizational capacity referring to the ability of people to relate with each other and work well together (Mitchell & Sackney, 2000). High organizational capacity was due to the participants' desire to function as professionals. This finding adds to theory with new evidence from the field that desire to function as a professional strengthens organizational capacity and is another component that should be included when building organizational capacity. The desire to function as a professional enhances dialogical communication.

The last mindset revealed in this study was that ownership over practice enhances dialogic communication. Members allowed for opportunity to strengthen their ability to build shared vision by allowing for ownership over practice. Members in this study allowed each other ownership over practice by not pushing each other to agree, make decisions or come to a consensus (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998), but by allowing each other to maintain their own views and ways of doing in their practice. Rather than passing over or ignoring tense complex issues (Ellinor & Gerard, 1998), members acknowledged the need for further consideration. Members conveyed the understanding that pushing views for consensus or decision making creates tensions that prevent building shared vision. Members understood that allowing for ownership over practice sets the stage for the dialogical communications required to build shared vision. Members felt a strong professional ability to do their jobs well. Along with this strong ability members were obligated by a sense of duty to continue professional learning to serve their students well. This sense of obligation and duty created what seemed to be an intrinsic motivation to continue to enhance ability to serve students well through professional learning. This sense of ownership over practice enhanced members' sense of obligation and duty to their profession. Members also conveyed that part of ownership over practice was being able to make decisions in the content and directions of their meetings. Ownership over these decisions was important to their sense of professional duty, and in turn, for their ability to communicate well together. Ownership over practice was revealed as an essential mindset necessary for dialogical communication in schools.

In this way, members created an environment where dialogue could be created and sustained. Members, by employing these mindsets, were highly aware of what they

needed to do to engage in a stable environment. A stable environment or container for

dialogue is created when people become aware of what it is they need to do dialogically

in order to engage in dialogue (Isaacs, 1993). A container is made stable, as Isaacs

(1993) suggested, through suspension of judgment. Suspension of judgment prevents the

ability of tensions in communication to thwart ability to engage in dialogue (Isaacs,

1993).   The participants created a stable container for dialogue through suspension, as

Isaacs (1993) suggested. In addition, participants employed these mindsets and this

contributed to stable dialogical environment. Suspension of judgment, as well as the use

of the four mindsets found in this study, prevented the ability of tensions in

communication to thwart ability to engage in dialogue. This finding adds to theory with

new evidence from the field these four mindsets strengthen dialogic communication; and

should be included when attempting to communicate in a dialogical manner.

6.2.4 Conditions Enhancing Dialogue

The fourth theme was the following: There are two conditions that enhance

dialogue: systemic support, and measurable outcomes. Participants commonly

understood three systemic requirements (professional learning community, time, and

administrative support) that allow them to communicate well together. Member

commonly indicated that they communicated in a dialogical manner together because of

the fact that they had the structured PLC. Without the PLC, members indicated, dialogue

would not happen. Working in a PLC is a constructivist way of doing in schools that

"better recognizes and accommodates social constructions of knowledge" (Mitchell &

Sackney, 2000, p. 125).   The PLC members worked together in a holistic view, a

"Bohmian view", as Mitchell and Sackney (2001) theorized as necessary for developing

shared understanding leading to shared ways of doing or shared goals in schools. The PLC is a necessary systemic support for dialogic communication in schools. This data provides further support for the use of PLCs in schools.

Time was also a systemic component enhancing dialogue. Participants indicated that in order to engage in dialogical communication members needed uninterrupted time to ask questions, process understanding and build shared understanding. Participants recognized time as a concrete condition necessary for dialogic communication and this relates to what Ellinor and Gerard (1998) theorized about the importance of allocated time for dialogue and "holding the door open long enough for new perceptions to emerge" (p. 111). Members, because they were provided with time, were able to hold the door open on ideas long enough for shared understanding and/or new perspectives to emerge.

This finding also relates to Bohm's (1996) explanation of dialogic inquiry allowing for time to process understanding. Often a question is asked and because of inability to answer spontaneously with certainty the question is passed over. Participants in this study rarely passed over ideas in communication and, if they did, found time to come back to the ideas, because they had allocated time. Bohm (1996) commented on reflection and the importance of time for reflection in dialogue—"if you stop to think about one point, by the time you have thought about it the group has moved on...it has become too late because the topic has changed" (p. 30). The participants were able to work in a dialogical manner because they had the time "for space in conversation to consider multiple perspectives" (Bohm, 1996).

Administrative support was also indicated as required for dialogic communication in schools. The administrators provided the time and the PLC structure for members to work together and participants indicated that without this support they would not be able to communicate in a dialogical manner. Tied to the condition of administrative support, but not mentioned by participants, is funding. In order for participants to have the time to meet as a PLC, teacher replacements needed to be hired to cover the members' classrooms while the members had PLC meetings.

The second condition enhancing dialogic communications was the existence of measurable outcomes. This data provides further support for the use of measureable outcomes for assessment for students, but also adds to theory and practice the benefits of measureable outcomes for educators' ability to communicate well together. The rubrics (measurable outcomes) used by the participants provided the members with a common tool to enhance the communication because the measurement tool provided then with a common ground for communication. Members conveyed that creating and using measurable outcomes from time spent working together was foundational to their ability to continue to communicate in a dialogical manner together. Being able to concretely measure students' success with the rubrics allowed the educators to see the success of their time spent together in dialogical communication. These findings add to theory with new evidence from the field that PLCs, time, administrative support, and measurable outcomes are conditions that enhance dialogic communication.

6.2.5 Commitment to Students

The fifth theme was the following: a highly developed commitment to students enhances dialogical communication in schools. The undergirding force allowing members to work in a dialogical manner together was their commitment to students. Participants' ability to meld perspectives and acknowledge member emergent roles, access and learn from each other, employ mindsets for dialogue, and create conditions for dialogue, were all ways of working together that stemmed from the members highly developed commitment to serving their students well. Members consistently expressed that when interrupted, challenged, or when their view was not incorporated into the whole, that it is their "commitment to students" that enabled them to use dialogical components to communicate in this way together.

Working in a dialogical manner represents a radically different way of functioning in schools. The data from this study relates to and adds to Dufour and Eaker's (1998) description of constructivist transformation from schools run in accordance with a mechanistic world view that has guided schools in the past to schools run with radically different philosophical assumptions (Dufour & Eaker, 1998). The participants, through their indication that they were able to communicate in a dialogical manner because of their commitment to students, reflects this constructivist transformation. The participants conveyed holistic assumptions that working together is better for students and, because of their commitment to doing their best for students, the members worked in a dialogical manner together.

Holistic ways of working together were used because member recognized that holistic approached were more appropriate for today's diverse and complex schools

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(Shields & Edwards, 2005). Working together in a holistic, collective, collaborative way is a response to the changing climate, diversity and complexity in today's schools to provide students with what they need in the 21st century (Mitchell & Sackney, 2001; Shields & Edwards, 2005). The commitment educators felt to providing students with what they need in the 21st century, in this new, diverse and complex climate, fuelled members ability to work together in a dialogical manner. This finding adds evidence from the field that a highly developed sense of commitment to students enhances dialogical communication in schools.

6.3 Contributions to Theory, Policy, and Practice

A review of the literature in Chapter 2 revealed that although dialogue is theoretically proposed as a process to enhance ways of working together there is limited data that provides evidence from the field about how dialogue actually works in schools to enhance constructivist ways of doing to produce shared vision. Exploration of participants' understandings in this study revealed that, in addition to existing theory, five additional catalytic components enhance the use of dialogue in schools. The findings provide implications for theory, policy, and practice.

The five findings from this study are significant in that they provide new evidence from the field that adds to existing theory about dialogue and provides field based evidence for how dialogue actually works in schools. Exploration of members' understandings of dialogue in this study revealed that dialogical communication is a process that engages individuals who work inherently with these five catalytic components. Through exploration of the members' understandings, it has become clear that these components are worked with and employed in an almost intuitive and implicit

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manner. The exploration uncovered five components participants used to create and sustain dialogic communication. Deliberate and explicit use of these five components would aid in enhancing dialogic communication in schools.   Policy makers, leaders, and educators wishing to enhance dialogical communication in schools need to employ, and provide opportunity for others to employ, these catalytic components deliberately and explicitly.

The first theme found in this study was: Building shared vision is a process that requires the use of dialogue to meld perspectives and acknowledge group member emergent roles. Participants worked together in the field in a holistic manner, which reflected members' preference for collaborating and formulating understanding with many perspectives, as opposed to one or two.   The study adds evidence from the field that members used dialogue to build shared vision, because of an understanding among the participants that holistic approaches to formulating understanding are more appropriate for complex and diverse school systems.

This finding supports existing theory that dialogue allows for multiple perspectives to be incorporated into shared vision. This finding also adds to theory specific details about how dialogue allows for multiple perspectives to be incorporated. Multiple perspectives are incorporated into shared vision through processes involved in acknowledging members' emergent roles and melding perspectives. The participants in this study reached greater understanding and shared vision in dialogic communication by acknowledging each members emergent role and melding perspective into a shared picture of the whole. Melding perspectives and acknowledging emergent roles are integral parts of dialogic communication and catalysts for the use of dialogue in schools.

Implications for policy and practice are apparent. Policy makers, leaders, and educators

wishing to encourage the use dialogue to build shared vision in schools need to provide

opportunity for people to meld perspectives and acknowledge each members emergent

role in communication.

The study revealed that members' roles can be acknowledged through explicit

actions, such as taking turns sharing perspectives, and deliberate uninterrupted

opportunity for people to speak in turn. Employing a roundtable format would ensure

each stakeholder is provided with uninterrupted opportunity to share perspectives.

Explicit acknowledgement of members' roles would, in turn, provide group members

opportunity to meld multiple perspectives into a shared vision. Each member's

perspective would be shared and melded into shared vision. The use of a prop, such as a

mandala, would ensure each members' role and perspective was melded into the whole.

The concept of the mandala is from eastern philosophical realms. Mandala is translated as

circle and represents wholeness, and can be seen as a model for the organizational

structure of building shared vision. In three concentric circles, leading to the center of

the mandala, each stakeholder would record their perspective in the outside circle. This

process resembles the coding process found in qualitative data analysis. From these

multiple perspectives in the outside circle, members would work together to meld

perspectives into categories and record these categories in the second circle. From these

categories, members would work together to develop the shared vision. This shared

vision would be recorded in the third circle, the center of the mandala. From this shared

vision, made up of multiple perspectives melded together in the mandala, members would

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develop an action plan rooted in, and explicitly and deliberately tied to, the multiple perspectives of stakeholders.

The second theme was the following: Dialogue provides access to others' ideas; enhancing learning through developing broad perspectives and modifying thinking. This finding supports the existing theoretical literature and is significant in that it adds specific detail from the field. Epistemologically, participants revealed that they believed understanding was formulated socially rather than individually. Therefore, members worked within constructivist epistemology. Dialogue has been proposed as a constructivist mode of communication. This finding supports existing theory that dialogue is a constructivist mode of communication and adds detail to the theory. Dialogue aids constructivist ways of working together because dialogue enables members to access and learn from others' ideas. Constructivist theory indicates accessing and learning from others' ideas as a way in which to socially formulate understanding. This finding indicates that dialogue is an integral part of ability to work in constructivist ways and the concept of dialogue should be included in theoretical discussions relating to constructivist theory. Accessing and learning from others' ideas is an integral part of dialogic communication and a catalyst for the use of dialogue in schools.

Implications for policy and practice are apparent. Policy makers, leaders, and educators wishing to encourage the use of dialogue in schools need to provide opportunity for people to access and learn from others' ideas. This includes explicit recognition by policy makers, leaders and educators that professional learning takes place among educators through opportunity to access others' ideas. Deliberate time,

underpinned by this explicit recognition, would enhance dialogical communication in schools.

The third theme was the following: There are mindsets that enhance dialogical communication: desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency; keen attention to what others need; a desire to function as professionals; and ownership over practice. This finding is significant because it provides new perspectives for theory as well as practice. The first mindset (desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency) supports the existing theory regarding dialogue creating coherence among groups of people (Bohm, 1996) and adds another dimension to this theory with details from the field. In order for groups of people to reach collective conscious, members need to have a strong desire to reach this cohesive state. A strong desire for commonality, cohesion, and consistency enhances dialogic communication.

Keen attention to what others need in communication was also a mindset that enhanced dialogic communication. Participants commonly understood that in communication they strive to attend to what they believe others need. This mindset adds to existing theory with specific details about how dialogue works in practice to deepen connections between people in groups. The study revealed that in order to function in a dialogical manner, with a deepened connection with people, participants must pay keen attention to what others need in communication. Keen attention to what others need is an integral part of dialogic communication and a catalyst for the use of dialogue in schools.

The study also revealed that a desire to function as professionals enhances dialogical communication in schools. The members in this study developed the atmosphere to work well together through their shared desire to function as professionals.

This finding supports existing theory regarding organizational capacity and adds new evidence with specific detail from the field. The desire to function as a professional strengthens organizational capacity and is another component that should be included when building organizational capacity. The desire to function as a professional is an integral part of dialogic communication and a catalyst for the use of dialogue in schools.

The last mindset revealed in this study was that ownership over practice enhances dialogic communication. Members in this study allowed for opportunity to enhance their ability to build shared vision by allowing for ownership over practice. Members understood that allowing for ownership over practice set the stage for the dialogical communications required to build shared vision. This finding provides a new perspective for dialogic theory that ownership over practice enhances dialogical communication in schools.

These mindsets collectively indicate that there is more to creating a stable environment for dialogue than previously theorized. Evidence from the field reveals that along with existing theoretical components are these mindsets that enhance dialogue. These four mindsets strengthen dialogic communication; and should be included when attempting to create a stable environment for communicating in a dialogical manner. Policy makers, leaders, and educators wishing to encourage the use dialogue in schools need to provide opportunity to develop commonality, cohesion, and consistency; learn about what it means to employ a keen attention to what others need in communication, work together as professionals, and maintain ownership over practice. Explicitly and deliberately using these mindsets would enhance ability to communicate in a dialogic manner. Providing opportunity to learn about these mindsets and work within these

mindsets could be done through professional learning activities. For example, a group of people working towards dialogical communication could explore the mindsets, relate the mindsets to what they do in their communicative practices, and explicitly and deliberately use the mindsets in communications in schools. Groups of people working together in schools could also, after exploring the mindsets this study found to enhance dialogic communication, add detail and create action plans related to each mindset, add mindsets that they have found to enhance dialogical communication in their practice, and/or remove mindsets that do not fit into their practice. This would lead members to explicitly uncover mindsets for dialogue, leading to the deliberate creation of their own stable environment for dialogue.

The fourth theme was the following: There are two conditions required for dialogue: systemic support, and measurable outcomes. These include three systemic requirements (professional learning community, time, and administrative support), and one pedagogical requirement (measureable outcomes). This finding is significant because it provides a new perspective for dialogue theory, policy and practice. These conditions are integral parts of dialogic communication and catalysts for the use of dialogue in schools. Policy makers, leaders, and educators wishing to encourage the use of dialogue in schools need to create the conditions for educators to work in this way together. This includes providing PLCs, time, administrative support, and opportunity for educators to create a common tool to assess measurable outcomes for their time spent working together.

The fifth theme was the following: a highly developed commitment to students is required for dialogical communication in schools. This finding is significant because it

provides a new perspective for theory as well as practice. The study revealed that the undergirding force allowing members to communicate in a dialogical manner: meld perspectives and acknowledge member emergent roles, access and learn from each other, employ mindsets required for dialogue, and create conditions required for dialogue, was commitment to students. A highly developed commitment to students is an integral part of dialogic communication and a catalyst for the use of dialogue in schools.

Policy makers, leaders, and educators wishing to encourage the use of dialogue to build shared vision in schools need to provide members opportunity to maintain, connect with, or re-connect with, and explicitly tie their work together to, their commitment to students. People in schools need to be provided with professional learning opportunities to explore their moral purpose, values, beliefs and how these beliefs affect practice. This exploration would help to explicate educators' commitment to students and this, in turn, would aid in maintaining, connecting, or re-connecting educators to their commitment to students. Leaders in schools should also model high commitment by making it a priority to explore, using dialogical communication, current and appropriate ways of doing education. This includes providing opportunity to collectively look into ways of serving students well in new, complex, and diverse school and world systems. Modeling this high commitment would also include connecting school initiatives, plans for action, and decision making consistently back to how students may benefit.

6.4 Researcher Reflections

This exploratory study was an investigation into PLC members' understandings of dialogue. Instrumental case study was used to gather members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision. The case for this study was two professional learning communities that participate in building shared vision. The instrumental case study was used to look for insight into a broader issue, and through studying the case, the researcher learned about the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 1995). I chose to use instrumental case study to investigate PLCs building shared vision, because dialogue is explained in the literature often as an abstract, almost ethereal concept. The concept of dialogue proper (as conceptualized in the literature) would have been difficult for participants to understand and for me to explain because of its ethereal nature. I also believe that explaining dialogue prior to the data collection would have influenced participant's interactions with each other and influences answers in focus groups and interviews. This method of studying something (PLC members building shared vision) in order to gain an understanding of something else (dialogue) proved to be successful in that I gained a concrete, not abstracted, a posteriori understanding of how dialogue works in schools.

At the beginning of the study, it was difficult to find participants. I wanted to investigate groups of educators using dialogue. I knew through my own experiences, and through the theoretical literature, that dialogue was the preferred method of communication in PLCs. I asked superintendents to make recommendations for PLCs working together to build shared vision. One superintendent did not make a recommendation. Perhaps because of the ethereal, abstract nature of shared vision and

the concept of dialogue the importance of studying dialogue in educational organizations was not understood or misunderstood. I remedied this situation by obtaining permission from the superintendent asking a principal of a school directly if I could study a PLC in her school.

The use of multiple methods of data collection: observations, focus groups, and interviews; as well as short informal communications, e-mails and telephone communications allowed me to collect multiple understandings from participants. I found the observations very useful in that during the observations I became familiar with the context. I also gathered data that helped to understand what participants themselves may have had difficulty articulating (Crotty, 1998). I used this data to provide feedback and prompting to participants about the observed behaviours. I believe this helped the participants to verbalize their understandings in the focus groups and interviews.

The focus group allowed participants to share their understandings of dialogue in a group setting. Focus group discussions allowed me to access data and insights that would be less accessible without interaction found in a group setting (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). I believe that listening to other members' helped to stimulate ideas and understandings with participants. It was interesting to see the participants feeding off of others' ideas and forming multi-perspective understandings of the whole.

Interviews were also used to gather participants' understandings of dialogue. This allowed me time and opportunity to follow up on observations made or statements made in focus groups. The focus group and interview questions were not pre-formatted, following Krauss' (2005) suggestion. Questioning in this way allowed me to tailor questions to participants and what I thought I could learn from them. To this end, I chose

to allow the questions to emerge and change as I became familiar with each participants context. The questions emerged and changed making it so that the questions were different for each person and context.

Allowing the questions to emerge in the data collection phases, however, made the presentation of the data more difficult. The presentation of the data open and unanalyzed in Chapter 4 reflects my desire to stay as true to the source as possible. This proved to be a laborious, but useful, process. I believe this presentation lends transparency, trustworthiness, and verisimilitude to the interpretations of the data in Chapter 5.

Presentation of the data open and unanalyzed is not as straightforward as it would be if the data came from structured questions pre-formatted linearly and asked in sequence with each participant. Often, in focus groups and interviews the questions are similar for everyone and the data can be presented in a linear fashion based on the sequenced questioning format. I purposefully used focus groups, as stated in Chapter 3, so that I could access data that would be less accessible without the group interaction (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). This resulted in data that are influenced by this interaction between participants. Due to this decision, formatting Chapter 4 presenting data open and unanalyzed was difficult. The interactions gave me valuable data, but the data is influenced by the interactions making it 'messy' (ie: participants finished each other's sentences, suggested words people were grappling for to explain themselves, paraphrased each other, listened and were influenced by what others said, cut each other off). The data presented in Chapter 4 was organized according to participant, with the interview data first, followed by the focus group data as opposed to the actual flow of interaction in the

focus groups. I believe that the decision to allow for interaction, and questions to emerge based on each participants particular context, was a more complex approach that did, however, provided me with more holistic data.

There were times when I wondered where the data collection was going, but I allowed myself to let it unfold. As a professional, a leader, and a teacher's coach, I am pleased that I did so because the dialogical communication that I observed and the participants articulation of what they were doing and why in their practice was inspirational and enlightening.

Working with the constructivist assumption that there are multiple realities and that these realities are contingent upon what individuals construct (Guba & Lincoln, 1989), proved to be an appropriate methodological stance for this study. The participants were working in very different contexts. Group two had been working at building shared vision within the group and the school as a whole for the past five years; while group one indicated that they built shared vision with their group, but not with the school as a whole. This discrepancy in participants' contexts led to diverse and varied data from each group. The methods of data collection also proved to be appropriate for the gathering of participants' constructions. Using multiple methods allowed me to gather multiple constructions of participant understandings.

It was exciting to be immersed in the data and witness first-hand the way in which participants worked in a dialogical manner. The participants displayed and verbalized understandings of working in a dialogical manner, how and why they work in this way together, and what is needed in order for them to work in this way together. Also

because of their strong commitment to students, the participants put much effort into working with me in the data collection phases.

As an emergent and exploratory study, there was so much data contained in the observations, focus groups, and interviews transcripts that it was difficult to know where to start. The questions in Charmaz's (2006) initial coding phase provided a starting point for the development of themes.

Although the findings are not intended to be generalizable, the findings provide insight into how dialogue can be used in schools. The reader can judge for themselves the applicability of the findings to their own contexts (Seale, 1999). The insights may be useful for leaders, educators, and policy makers wishing to encourage the use of dialogue in schools.

6.5 Suggestions for Future Research

The findings from this investigation into PLC members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision revealed numerous insights from the field that could be applied to theory, practice, and policy. The study was limited to a small sample of educators from two school divisions in Saskatchewan. Replicating the study, with a larger sample of educators from other school divisions could lead to further insights into how dialogue is used in practice.

Instrumental case study was used to gather members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision. The case for this study was two professional learning communities that participate in building shared vision. The case was used to look for insight into the broader issue to learn about the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 1995). The researcher recommends replication of this study with the use of a different

case. Using a different case, from any number of educational stakeholders, such as educator inquiry groups, administrative divisional leaders, school principals, or Indigenous groups, would lead to a more in depth exploration of the phenomenon of dialogue in educational organizations. In addition, inclusion of data from other case studies would increase the generalizability of the findings.

The findings from this study provide broad new insight into how dialogue is used, and can be used, in schools. Until now, the literature concerning dialogue was theoretical. The insights provide evidence from the field about how dialogue works in practice, and also reveal the need for further investigation into the nature of dialogue. Further investigation into the five catalysts for the use of dialogue in practice, found in this study, would add to theory, policy, and practices for the use of dialogue in educational organizations. Each finding could be studied in more depth. For example, the second finding: dialogue provides access to others' ideas; enhancing learning through developing broad perspectives and modifying thinking, could be investigated further to yield evidence from the field that would inform leaders about how to provide educators with opportunities for quality professional development and professional learning. Further investigation into this finding may also yield information about how to affect effective change in schools and/or positively influence school improvement initiatives.

Action research, extending from the findings and recommendations in this study would also be useful in furthering understanding of how dialogue works in practice. One or more of the five findings from this study could be employed in the field to further investigate the phenomenon of dialogue. Using an action research question such as: Will the development and use of measureable outcomes for dialogue, aid educators in

communicating well together?, could be used to add additional information to theory, policy, and practice about how to create the conditions for dialogical communication in schools. The mandala for building shared vision could also be studied in action research.

Quantitative data could also be gathered in to form of student test scores, or assessments. Using measurable outcomes from the time spent in dialogue and measuring the effect that this type of communication has on student achievement, could further the desire for educators to work in this way together. Quantitative data, reflecting dialogic ways of doing and being in schools, as measured by student assessments indicating gains in student achievement, would also influence leaders and policy makers to create the conditions for educators to work in this way together.

This phenomenon could also be looked into by researchers wishing to encourage dialogical ways of doing and being in schools for the purposes of enhancing professionalism, democracy, and social justice in organizations. The researcher recommends and invites further research into the phenomenon of dialogue.

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Appendix A

Ethics Application

Letter for Permission to Access – Sample

Introductory Letters – Sample

Informed Consent Forms for Participants

Consent Form for Data Transcription Release

1. **Name of researcher(s)**
   Dr. Michelle Prytula   Supervisor, Educational Administration

1a. **Name of student**
   Catherine Neumann-Boxer   Ph. D. Candidate, Educational Administration

1b. **Anticipated start date of the research study (phase) and the expected completion date of the study (phase).**

   Anticipated Start Date: May, 2011
   Anticipated Completion Date: December, 2011

2. **Title of Study**
Dialogue in Educational Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Dialogue and Shared Vision

3. **Abstract (100-250 words)**

The purpose of this study is to explore and conceptualize professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue. I hope to further the understanding of how the use of dialogue furthers constructivist ways of doing in schools and contributes to building shared vision. The following research question will focus the study:

1. What are members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision in schools?

      This study will be conducted in two phases. First, schools that practice building shared vision will be identified. Second, observations, interviews and focus group will take place and stories of participants' understandings will be gathered. Principles of constructivist grounded theory, constant comparison and coding, will be used in the data analysis phase to construct codes from participants' stories and researcher's observations.

4. **Funding**
   The study will be funded by the researcher's graduate fellowship.

5. **Expertise**
   This research study does not include vulnerable populations or distinct cultural groups, and is not above minimal risk, so expertise is inapplicable.

6. **Conflict of Interest**

        There is no anticipated conflict of interest in this study.

7. **Participants**

Purposive sampling will be used to select participants. A school division superintendent and a coordinator will be asked to identify two schools that participate in developing shared vision based on knowledge of the schools within the division. Individuals from the recommended schools who are interested in participating in the study will be asked to engage in a short purposive sampling pre-interview, included in Appendix B. Following this pre-interview, the six selected participants will be asked to participate in the research using the recruiting letters included in Appendix A.

7. **Recruitment Material**

A sample of the recruitment material that will be used in this study is included as Appendix A (invitation to participate, selection criteria, superintendent selection form).

8. **Consent**

        After reading the letter and the criteria for selection, teachers and administrators will decide whether they would like to be involved in the research study. Those who choose to be involved will be asked to give consent by signing the study informed consent form (see Appendix A). Participants will be informed that they may withdraw at any time until the data is coded in the data analysis stage in October, 2011 and may retract any data that was provided for the study.

9. **Methods/Procedures**

This is a qualitative research case study. Data will be collected from researcher observation, focus groups, and interviews. Experiences with and understandings of dialogue will be gathered. The data will be recorded and transcribed. Researcher observation will be used for the researcher to become familiar with the study context. Focus group and semi-structured interviews will follow the observation and will not be pre-formatted—"rather than approaching measurement with the idea of constructing a fixed instrument or set of questions, qualitative researchers choose to allow the questions to emerge and change as one becomes familiar with the study context" (Krauss, 2005, p. 760). Principles of grounded theory, constant comparison and coding, will be used to interpret the data. After the observation, focus group, and interviews key themes will be coded and compared (Charmaz, 2006). A set of possible focus group and interview questions has been developed for this study and are included in Appendix B. Depending on the researcher's observations and the direction the participants take during the focus group and interviews, the questions may be altered to suit their circumstances. The data will be presented with careful consideration of the privacy and anonymity of the participants and of the situations and places that they talk about.

10. **Storage of Data**

Upon completion of the study, all collected data (audio recordings, transcripts, correspondence between researchers and participants, electronic files, and notes taken by the researcher) will be retained by my supervisor, Dr. Michelle Prytula of Educational

Administration in the College of Education according to the guidelines defined by the University of Saskatchewan. After the study is complete, data will be stored in a locked cabinet for a minimum of five years. After this period of time, the data will be destroyed.

11. Dissemination of Results
Results from the study may be used in presentations or may be used in a book or other publishable format. The anonymity of the participants, their respective locations, and events will be respected at all times by use of pseudonyms.

12. Risk, Benefits, and Deception
The potential benefits of this study include an understanding of views and experiences from the field regarding dialogue and how the use of dialogic processes enhances collaborative ways of being in educational organizations. Deception will not be used in this study. Participants will not be exposed to harm, discomfort, or perceived harms. There is one potential risk. There is the possibility that participants may share information which may put the participant or a third party at risk, if their identity was compromised. An educator may name a school, fellow educator, administrator or may describe a situation that would threaten anonymity. Because of this, names and locations will be changed to protect the anonymity of the participants, and extra care will be taken when reporting vulnerable segments from interviews. As well, when approving interview transcripts, participants will be able to make changes if they feel that the information contained in the transcript could compromise their or a third party's anonymity, or damage reputation. Participants will be able to change their transcripts or withdraw from the study at any time.

To assess the degree of risk involved in this study, I have considered the following questions:

a) *Are you planning to study a vulnerable population? This would include, for example, people who are in a state of emotional distress, who are physically ill, who have recently experienced a traumatic event, or who have been recruited into the study because they have previously experienced a severe emotional trauma, such as abuse.*

No. Leaders and educators are not a vulnerable population.

b) *Are you planning to study a captive or dependent population, such as children or prisoners?*

No. Leaders and educators are neither captive nor dependent.

c) *Is there an institutional/ power relationship between researcher and participant (e.g., employer/employee, teacher/student, counsellor/client)?*

No. The relationship is researcher to educator and researcher to leader; a power relationship does not exist.

d) *Will it be possible to associate specific information in your data file with specific participants?*

No. The researcher will take measures to ensure that the information in the data file cannot be associated with specific participants.

> e) *Is there a possibility that third parties may be exposed to loss of confidentiality/ anonymity?*

No. To ensure that third parties will not be exposed to loss of confidentiality/anonymity, exceptional care in the reporting of the results will exist.

> f) *Are you using audio or videotaping?*

Yes. The observations, focus groups and interviews will be recorded using audio. The researchers and transcribers will be the only people who hear the recordings. The transcripts will be made available to the participants if they wish to review them. They will have the opportunity to make changes if they believe the information within the transcript will compromise anonymity of themselves or a third party. Participants will be asked to sign a transcript release form (Appendix A) when the transcripts are deemed appropriate.

> g) *Will participants be actively deceived or misled?*

No. Participants will not be deceived or misled during this study.

> h) *Are the research procedures likely to cause any degree of discomfort, fatigue, or stress?*

No. The research procedures are not intended to cause any degree of discomfort, fatigue, or stress. If participants experience discomfort, they are free to remove themselves from the study at any point in time. The focus group and interviews will be conducted as a collegial conversation, therefore no discomfort, fatigue, or stress should arise. Anticipated time frame for the interview is one hour.

> i) *Do you plan to ask participants questions that are personal or sensitive? Are there questions that might be upsetting to the respondent?*

No. The researcher does not plan to ask personal or sensitive questions directed at upsetting the participants. The focus group and interview questions will be open-ended, and directed by the participants.

> j) *Are the procedures likely to induce embarrassment, humiliation, lowered self-esteem, guilt, conflict, anger, distress, or any other negative emotional state?*

No. The research is unlikely to induce a negative emotional state in participants.

> k) *Is there any social risk (e.g., possible loss of status, privacy or reputation)?*

No. The researchers will ensure careful consideration while reporting results so as to prevent the possible social risk of loss of privacy and loss of reputation.

> l) *Will the research infringe on the rights of participants by, for example, withholding beneficial treatment in control groups, restricting access to education or treatment?*

No. The research will not infringe upon the rights of the participants.

m) Will participants receive compensation of any type? Is the degree of compensation sufficient to act as a coercion to participate?
No.

n) Can you think of any other possible harm that participants might experience as a result of participating in this study?
No, I cannot think of any other possible harm that participants might experience by participating in the study.

13.   Confidentiality

To protect the confidentiality and anonymity of participants and third parties, pseudonyms will be used for names, locations, programs, and events. Direct quotations will be used in the results, but quotations will be carefully chosen so as not to identify participants, locations, programs, or events. Participants will be asked to sign a transcript release form (see Appendix B).

14.   Data/Transcript Release

After the interview process and before findings are published, all participants have the opportunity to withdraw their responses. All participants will have the opportunity to review the final transcript and sign the transcript release form to acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what they said or intended to say (included in Appendix B).

15.   Debriefing and Feedback

The researchers' contact information will be shared with the participants. Therefore if at any point during the process they wish to contact them with questions or concerns, they will have to the avenue to do so. When the research is completed, a summary of the results will be delivered to the participants. Upon request, an electronic copy of the completed results will also be available to participants.

16.   Required Signatures

_____   _____
Dr. Michelle Prytula   Dr. Patrick Renihan
Supervisor   Department Head

_____
Catherine Neumann-Boxer
Researcher

17. **Required Contact Information**

Dr. Michelle Prytula
Supervisor
Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X1
(306) 966-6880
michelle.prytula@usask.ca

Catherine Neumann-Boxer
Ph. D. (Candidate)
Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X1
(306) 716-0412
c.neumann-boxer@usask.ca

Dr. Patrick Renihan
Department Head
Educational Administration
College of Education
University of Saskatchewan
28 Campus Drive
Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X1
(306) 966-7620
pat.renihan@usask.ca

Letter for Permission to Access – Sample

[Insert Date]

Dear Director,

Thank you for considering this request to allow me to conduct my research titled *Dialogue in Educational Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Dialogue and Shared Vision.* The purpose of this study is to explore and conceptualize professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue. I hope to further the understanding of how the use of dialogue furthers constructivist ways of doing in schools and contributes to building shared vision. The following research question will focus the study:

1.   What are professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue as a process for building shared vision in schools?

I am seeking to conduct two observations of 10-20 participants engaged in professional learning community (PLC) meeting. I am also seeking to conduct two focus groups with each PLC. I will ask superintendents or coordinators with assistance in identifying six schools who meet the selection criteria attached. Following a brief pre-interview with the school principals, I will choose two PLCs to participate.

I will take great care to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of all participants will be preserved by using pseudonyms. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary. I will be unobtrusive during the research process, and will ask participants to participate outside of regular school hours at their convenience. Observations and focus groups will be audio recorded. Participants will be informed of the purpose of the study and, if they choose, will have the option to withdraw from the study at any point in time until the data analysis stage in October, 2011.

The information gathered from the educators who participate in this study may be used for presentations at conferences, professional venues, and academic publications. The taped interviews will be transcribed verbatim. Each participant will be provided with a copy of their data, transcripts and a copy of the results of the study.

I ask for your support by allowing me access to these individuals by signing this form. Thank you for your support.

_____   _____   _____
Catherine Neumann-Boxer   Director of Education   Date
Researcher
University of Saskatchewan

Introductory Letter (Observation and Focus Group) - Sample

Dear Participant,

My name is Catherine Neumann-Boxer, and I am a Ph.D. candidate with the Department of Educational Administration at the University of Saskatchewan. I am conducting a study titled *Dialogue in Educational Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Dialogue and Shared Vision.* The purpose of this study is to explore and conceptualize professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue. I will collect data from observations and focus groups to gather educators' understandings and experiences. Coding and constant comparison will be used to analyze data.

I am seeking to conduct two observations and two focus group sessions of 10-20 participants engaged in professional learning community (PLC). The purpose of the observations is to familiarize myself (the researcher) with the PLC context. The purpose of the focus groups is to gather participant understandings of dialogue. The observations and focus groups will last approximately one hour and will be audio-recorded. I may contact you at a later date to ask you questions or clarify data from the focus group sessions.

This research will provide valuable information for theory and practice regarding dialogic processes in schools, for policy makers in the creation of communication polis and professional development, as well as in the expectations and role of teachers and leaders. The information gathered from teachers and leaders who participate in this study will be used for presentations, professional venues, and academic publications. The taped focus groups will be transcribed verbatim. You will have an opportunity to view transcripts to remove or add any information. You will be asked to sign a transcript release form. Data resulting from the focus groups will be examined for themes. Direct quotations may be, but pseudonyms will be used to maintain anonymity.

Your cooperation in this study would be greatly appreciated. If you are interested in participating, please read and sign the consent form. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, I can be contacted by e-mail at cneumann-boxer@usask.ca or by phone 966-7017. Thank you, in advance, for your consideration and cooperation.

Sincerely,
Catherine Neumann-Boxer (Ph.D. Candidate)
University of Saskatchewan

Informed Consent Form for Participation

You are invited to participate in a study entitled *Dialogue in Educational Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Dialogue and Shared Vision.* Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

Researcher(s):
Michelle Prytula PhD. University of Saskatchewan. 966-7023
Catherine Neumann-Boxer (PhD Candidate, University of Saskatchewan) 966-7017

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to explore and conceptualize professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue. I will collect data from two observations of your PLC meetings and two PLC focus groups. Coding and constant comparison will be used to analyze the data. The goal is to determine what your understandings of how dialogue works in schools to build shared vision are.

Potential Benefits: This research will provide valuable information for theory and practice regarding dialogue in schools. The research may also assist policy makers in the creation of communication policy and professional development, as well as in the expectations and role of the teacher and leader. The information gathered from teachers and leaders who participate in this study will be used for presentations and academic publications. The taped interviews will be transcribed verbatim. You will be asked to sign a transcript release form. Data resulting from the interviews will be examined for themes.

Potential Risks: All participants and locations will be assigned pseudonyms. As the pool of possible teachers involved is fairly large, identification of one teacher is unlikely. However, because it is possible that the anonymity of participants may be compromised through direct quotes, participants will be provided with the opportunity to withdraw their responses after their interview and prior to the publication of the findings. Participants will be asked to review the final transcript and sign a transcript release form wherein they acknowledge by that the transcript accurately reflects what they said or intended to say.

Storage of Data: Upon completion of the study, all data (digital tapes, electronic, and paper) will be securely stored and retained by Dr. Michelle Prytula in accordance with the guidelines defined by the University of Saskatchewan. The data will be stored for five years after completion of the study. After this time, the data will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: All names and locations will be given pseudonyms in this study. Participants will be asked to sign a transcript release form. Direct quotations may be used, however, pseudonyms will be used in the quotes as well.

Right to Withdraw: Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, until October, 2011. If you withdraw from the study, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed at your request. As researchers, we

will advise you, the participant, of any new information that may have a bearing on your decision to participate.

Questions: If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point. You are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions. This study has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board on (insert date). Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Ethics Office at 966-2084. Out of town participants may call collect.

Consent to Participate: I have read and understood the description provided above. I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

_____ _____
(Name of Participant)   (Date)

_____ _____
(Signature of Participant)   (Signature of Researcher)

Please provide the phone number you wish to be contacted at: _____

Consent Form for Data Transcription Release

Study Title: *Dialogue in Educational Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Dialogue and Shared Vision.*

I am returning the transcripts of your audio-recorded focus groups for your perusal. I _____, have reviewed the complete transcript and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from them as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflect what I said in my personal interviews with Catherine Neumann-Boxer. I hereby authorize the release of the transcript to Catherine Neumann-Boxer to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data Transcript Release Form for my own records.

_____ _____

Participant Signature   Date

_____ _____

Researcher Signature   Date

Appendix B

Selection Tools

Focus Group and Interview Tools

Superintendent/Coordinator Selection Letter - Sample

Dear Superintendent and/or Coordinator,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in identifying learning communities with members who building shared vision. The purpose of this study is to explore and conceptualize professional learning community members' understandings of dialogue. Observations and focus groups will take place and stories of participants' understandings will be gathered. Coding and constant comparison will be used to analyze data. The goal is to determine what participants' understandings of how dialogue works in schools to build shared vision are.

I seek to conduct observations and focus groups with groups of 10-20 educators. For this purpose, I am asking you to assist me in identifying six schools with professional learning communities which you perceive as engaging in processes that build shared vision. Following a brief purposive sampling pre-interview with each of the six schools principals, I will choose two willing PLCs for participation in the study.

I will take great care to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of all participants will be preserved using pseudonyms, and will only ask them to participate on a voluntary basis. I will also be as unobtrusive as possible, and will ask each teacher to participate on their own time and at their convenience. All observations and focus groups will be recorded. Participants will be made aware of the purpose of the study, and will have the option of withdrawing from the study if they choose. Each participant will also be provided with a copy of their data and transcripts, as well as a copy of the results of the study. The results will be used for my doctoral dissertations, and may later be published in a scholarly journal, used for a presentation or at a conference.
I ask your cooperation by completing the attached form to the best of your knowledge. Thank you for your support.

_____
Catherine Neumann-Boxer
Researcher
University of Saskatchewan

Dialogue in Educational Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Dialogue and Shared Vision.

Nomination Criteria

Please identify six professional learning communities which you perceive as engaging in processes that build shared vision.

Shared vision is defined in the study as a shared mental image of a possible and desirable future state of an organization which guides decisions and action in organizations made up of multiple perspectives (Senge, 1990).

Schools

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

6) _____

Dialogue in Educational Organizations: An Exploratory Study of Dialogue and Shared Vision.

Principals' Purposive Sampling Pre-Interview Questions

Do you perceive the process of building shared vision as happening in your learning community?
If so, please explain below.

_____ Yes   _____ No

1. What is your understanding of the processes used to build shared vision in your learning community?

2.   What role does dialogue play in building shared vision in you learning community?

Understandings and Experiences with Dialogue and Building Shared Vision

Guiding Questions for Focus Groups and Interviews

1) Tell me about building shared vision in your learning community. How did you come to build shared vision?

2) When did you first experience or notice that the building of shared vision was happening?

3) What was it like? What did you think then? Who, if anyone, influenced your actions? Tell me about how he/she or they influenced you.

4) Could you describe the events that led up to building shared vision?

5) Could you describe the events that preceded building shared vision?

6) How would you describe how you viewed building shared vision before it was built?

7) What is needed for you to work in this way together?

8) Could you describe specific components of communication that helped build shared vision?

9) What prompts you to work in this way?

10) What is good about the way the group communicates?

11) What do you do or see others doing in your communications?