

SECONDARY ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION
OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE AREA OF WRITING

A Record of Study

by

BETH C. BRABHAM

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Chair of Committee,	William Rupley
Committee Members,	Zoreh Eslami
	Mack Burke
	Li-Jen Kuo
Head of Department,	Lynn Burlbaw

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study investigated teachers' perceptions and implementation of professional development in writing instruction at a high school campus. A layered approach to professional development was utilized: (1) one group received weekly professional development during a Professional Learning Community (PLC) and also participated on a district writing team, (2) one group received weekly professional development during a PLC and received instructional coaching, and (3) one group received only weekly professional development during a PLC.

Qualitative data consisted of a teacher survey to determine teachers' perceptions of professional development received, observation notes of body and verbal language during PLCs when professional development was given, reflection notes documented by teachers receiving instructional coaching, and interviews of the teachers who received instructional coaching.

Results of this study showed that, teachers do value learning that takes place in PLCs and are also willing to try to incorporate their new learning into the instructional practices based on what they learn in PLCs. No significant differences occurred from the pre-observation to the post-observation for teachers in any group. Also, teachers who received instructional coaching not only became more aware of practices in their classrooms that were ineffective, they valued the collaboration and collegiality that occurred during the coaching process.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Brian, for twenty years of love and support. You have especially encouraged me and believed in me these last four years as I often didn't believe in myself. I know that you and I were in opposite roles years ago as you obtained your doctorate, and I thank you for the endless sacrifices and hours of listening you gave me as I journeyed through this process. Thank you for who you are as a person, a father, a husband, and a man of God.

To my two precious children, Tommy and Tori. I began this journey during your teenage years, and I had no idea how things would go. I worried so many times that I was taking too much time away from you to pursue this, but you were a constant encouragement to me to finish what I started. I pray that your dad and I have shown you the importance of education and of completing the task, regardless of how difficult it may be.

To my Lord and Savior, I dedicate all of this to you. I said when I began this degree that all I wanted was to tell others that You receive the glory for anything I do. I still desire that You use this degree in a way that draws others to You. I am forever thankful for this journey, as I have grown closer to You along the way.

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I must begin by thanking God for giving me everything I needed to complete this degree. I vowed to give Him glory and to honor Him throughout this entire process, and all praise goes to Him for supplying me with the time, patience, resources, and support to persevere.

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NOMENCLATURE

EPre	Engagement Pre-observation
EPost	Engagement Post-observation
SPre	Synthesis Pre-observation
SPost	Synthesis Post-observation
EvPre	Evaluative Pre-observation
EvPost	Evaluative Post-observation
MsPre	Motivational Strategies Pre-observation
MsPost	Motivational Strategies Post-observation
MaPre	Monitored and Assessed Pre-observation
MaPost	Monitored and Assessed Post-observation
NsPre	Needs of Strugglers Addressed Pre-observation
NsPost	Needs of Strugglers Addressed Post-observation
CfPre	Constructive Feedback Pre-observation
CfPost	Constructive Feedback Post-observation
GoPre	Graphic Organizers Pre-observation
GoPost	Graphic Organizers Post-observation
Bpre	Brainstorming Pre-observation
Bpost	Brainstorming Post-observation
SpPre	Setting Objectives/Providing Feedback Pre-observation
SpPost	Setting Objectives/Providing Feedback Post-observation

RpPre	Reinforcing Effort/Providing Recognition Pre-observation
RpPost	Reinforcing Effort/Providing Recognition Post-observation
13CPre	Revising Drafts Pre-test
13CPost	Revising Drafts Post-test
13DPre	Editing Drafts Pre-test
13DPost	Editing Drafts Post-test
15APre	Revising Expository Text Pre-test
15APost	Revising Expository Text Post-test
17CPre	Editing Sentence Structure Pre-test
17CPost	Editing Sentence Structure Post-test
18BPre	Editing Punctuation Pre-test
18BPost	Editing Punctuation Post-test
19APre	Editing Spelling Pre-test
19APost	Editing Spelling Post-test

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

During the 2011-2012 school year, the state of Texas adopted a new state assessment model called the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR). Prior to STAAR, students' writing skills were measured annually through the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS). Teachers were aware that STAAR would replace TAKS, but many were not concerned with differences between the two assessments. In Wildflower ISD (pseudonym), students were tested in writing in 7th and 10th grade with TAKS, and writing scores were high. Therefore, most teachers felt they had prepared students well for writing. However, the new assessment was far more rigorous and added a writing test in 9th grade, and WISD students were not being taught writing in a way that would equip them with strong skills necessary to graduate and be successful in college and a career. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) (2015a) stated prior to the change from TAKS to STAAR that "the rigor of items will be increased by assessing skills at a greater depth and level of cognitive complexity" (para. 4). In addition, STAAR was designed to align with the previously revised English Language Arts standards that were implemented in the curriculum in 2009-2010 (Texas Education Agency, 2015b). The revised standards were expectations for students to master by the end of each grade level that determined the adequate development of English Language Arts content knowledge needed in order to move towards being college and career ready by the time they graduated from high school. With the new assessment, the focus was on fewer standards being assessed each year, but students were being assessed at a much

deeper level in order to determine if they could think and produce at a higher complexity. (TEA, 2015c). TEA allowed for a phase-in period for the levels of performance on the STAAR tests in order to “provide school districts with sufficient time to adjust instructional, provide new professional development, increase teacher effectiveness, and close knowledge gaps” (TEA, 2014b, p. 7).

Attempts were made by the researcher both prior to and after implementation of STAAR to help teachers understand that writing instruction changes needed to take place in their classrooms and to understand the expectations of TEA as reflected in the STAAR. These attempts included meeting with English Language Arts teachers from 5th-12th grades during campus meetings and summer professional development on the distinct differences in the two assessment systems. Teachers were taught the new structure of the assessment, the specific standards that were going to be included on the assessment, and the breakdown of the grading for the writing assessment that would be done by TEA. Teachers learned that students must be able to produce authentic writing that involved having strong organization, original ideas, and a command of conventions in their writing. Following initial trainings to educate teachers on the specific layout of the new assessment, the researcher worked with individual grade level teachers guiding them in lesson planning and assessing that would better align with the new assessment.

The researcher and district curriculum colleagues also met several times with campus principals to inform and educate them on changes in the new system. These meetings occurred monthly during district-wide curriculum meetings where curriculum coordinators spent time with each principal to identify assessment changes in order to

help them guide their teachers with instructional changes that needed to occur to align with the new assessment. The researcher specifically guided the principals in understanding the types of writing students would be expected to produce, the standards that would be assessed on the writing test at each grade level where the writing test was given, and information on how students would be graded at the state level. The principals learned the same information as the teachers regarding the structure of the writing that must be produced. That writing structure included key components of strong organization, original ideas, and a command of conventions.

National and state data on writing supported that students have not made significant improvement in writing at the secondary level since “the federal government began conducting regular assessments of student achievement in the 1970s” (Southern Regional Education Board, 2013). Jack Buckley, Commissioner for the National Center for Education Statistics, reported in a press release on September 14, 2012, regarding 2011 national writing assessment results that only twenty-seven percent of eighth grade students performed at or above the proficient level of writing; fifty-four percent of eighth grade students assessed performed at the basic level of proficient writing (Buckley, 2012). According to Buckley (2012) in an interpretation of writing, “the basic achievement level denotes partial mastery of prerequisite knowledge and skills that are fundamental for proficient work at each grade.” During the first year of the STAAR assessment, Texas high school students’ STAAR writing assessment data revealed that in 2012, over 152,000 9th graders did not pass the writing test (Young, 2012), and in 2013, 150,000 of the same cohort of students taking the 10th grade writing test did not

pass (Young, 2013). The students at the WISD's high school had parallel results, which was the reason for the original concern when the assessment model changed. The lack of writing proficiency among high school students in WISD was clearly an issue when 20% of the students were in danger of not graduating based on their writing assessment results when STAAR began (Texas Education Agency, 2015d).

Students' low writing performance is further corroborated by the researcher's communication with teachers and stakeholders. Understanding issues that have collectively contributed to this problem, such as teachers' frustration with colleagues for not wanting to improve writing instruction, teachers' who do not see the need to improve instruction, and teachers who are engaged in weak professional development experiences, are focal points for establishing within teachers a desire to enhance the quality of their writing instruction.

Background to the Study

Over the past few years, WISD students' writing scores and writing proficiency have drastically declined as the state assessment changed from TAKS to STAAR. At the end of the TAKS assessment system, the percentage of high school students (all students tested at the 10th grade level) in WISD passing the writing test was 97% (TEA, 2012). The following year in 2012-2013 with the implementation of the STAAR assessment, the percentage of high school students (all students in 9th and 10th grade) in WISD passing the writing test was 69% (TEA, 2013). Therefore, within one year, the students in WISD passing the writing test dropped 28%. Within the WISD is a large number of students annually who lack writing proficiency, coupled with a lack of sustained,

substantial professional development for teachers in the teaching of writing over the last five years. English teachers at the secondary level have struggled to help students reach the of proficiency level needed to pass the state writing tests. In order to help students reach that level of proficiency in writing, teachers must be able to know and teach the writing process, ensure that adequate time for writing occurs inside and outside of class, teach students the thinking process that occurs with writing, teach and refine editing skills of the English language conventions, model strong writing skills and make sure that students know how to write for specific audiences (National Council of Teachers of English, 2015). By the time a student is ready to graduate from high school, he or she should be “able to produce an effectively organized and fully developed response within the time allowed that uses analytical, evaluative, or creative thinking” (Applebee, A.N., & Langer, J.A., 2009, p. 18). Through teaching and observing teachers over the last three years, the researcher has learned from English Language Arts teachers that weak and inconsistent professional development that helps them instruct students to the proficient level of writing is a primary concern for WISD.

Improving writing proficiency of WISD students at the high school levels can only be brought about by strong, sustained professional development that improves instructional approaches (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Oprhanos, 2009a). Thus, the focus of this study is to implement strong, sustained professional development for WISD’s high school English teachers and to determine their perceptions of that professional development as it relates to their improving writing instruction in their classrooms.

WISD is located in central Texas and is comprised of six elementary schools, two intermediate schools, one middle school, and one large high school. The district serves over 7,400 students within those 10 campuses (Texas Education Agency, 2014a). At the high school campus, which is the focus of this study, there are 18 ELA teachers: 16 of whom are regular education teachers and 2 who are reading/writing intervention teachers. The high school has four assistant principals, one associate principal and one principal. One of the assistant principals is assigned to work primarily with the ELA teachers.

District data collected at the end of 2013-2014 school year reflected a large number of students who did not pass the STAAR Writing assessment. Data from the previous year also showed a large percentage of students who did not pass the state writing assessment. Table 1.1 presents a comparison over the past three years of WISD and Texas STAAR Writing Performance and the passing rate for the 9th and 10th grades, which are the grades where the STAAR end-of-course writing assessment is given at the high school level.

Table 1.1 WISD and Texas STAAR Writing Satisfactory Performance 2012-2014

STAAR Writing Test	WISD	State of Texas
9 th Grade Writing	74.34%	55%
Spring 2012		

Table 1.1 Continued

STAAR Writing Test	WISD	State of Texas
9 th Grade Writing Spring 2013	68.92%	48%
9 th Grade Reading/Writing Spring 2014	84.27%	62%
10 th Grade Writing Spring 2012	NA	46%
10 th Grade Writing Spring 2013	68.92%	52%
10 th Grade Reading/Writing Spring 2014	85.76%	66%

Although WISD’s writing assessment scores are higher than the state’s average, the percentage of students reaching passing level is a concern for the district. These state assessment scores are computed under the first phase-in levels for passing. The first phase-in level determined the minimum scores for meeting satisfactory performance on the test. Higher passing rate levels will occur beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. Therefore, overall percentages of students meeting satisfactory performance could decline even more if the problem of weak writing instruction is not addressed. In addition, the state changed the high school writing assessment and combined it with

reading. The increase in scores from 2013 to 2014 reflects an increase in overall percentages, due partly to the addition of reading.

WISD demographics have changed over the last 10-15 years, and during that time, the district's writing scores and proficiency in writing for students have declined. With increased writing performance expectations for students in both state standards and state assessments, there are presently almost 20% of students not reaching this criterion to graduate high school due to not passing one or both of the high school state writing assessments.

Researcher's Role

The researcher has overseen the secondary ELA curriculum for the last six years. Prior to the implementation of STARR, students were taught formulaic writing to pass the TAKS writing assessment, which worked for most students. Teachers were alerted through department meetings and school professional development for two years leading up to the assessment change that the new assessment (STAAR) was more rigorous, and the significant decline in the percent of students passing the high school STAAR writing tests as compared to the percent of students who passed the TAKS test indicated that they were not proficient enough in their writing to meet the increased rigor of STAAR. When the new state assessment (STAAR) was implemented four years ago, the school district quickly saw a decline in students' writing scores. During 2013-2014 and 2014-2015 school years, an attempt has been made to reconcile this problem. Last year, all English teachers from the middle and high school campuses met every month for professional development. Examples of tasks associated with the focus of this PD were:

- Calibration exercises (teachers use student writing and a writing rubric to collaborate and discuss components of the rubric and what student writing should look like in order to show proficiency in each area being assessed. Areas typically assessed in a writing rubric would be the overall organization of a paper, the thesis and development of ideas in a paper, and grammatical conventions of a paper consisting of spelling, punctuation, grammar, capitalization and understanding paragraph usage (Education Northwest, 2015, para. 6).
- Examination of students' writing (much like calibration exercises to practice collaborate on the components of strong writing, teachers examine students' writing to determine if progress is being made towards proficiency)
- Reflection about teaching writing through videos (teachers record themselves while teaching writing or have a colleague record their teaching. Teachers then reflect on their instruction to determine their strengths and weaknesses in order to improve in needed areas)

Tasks such as these were intended to move individual writing teachers forward in improving their writing instruction. In addition, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were put in place at the middle and high school campuses.

More intense and focused PD was initiated for 2014-15. PLCs were added to the high school teachers' day, whereby they had a class period every single day that allowed them the opportunity to meet and collaborate with their grade-level teams. The daily focus areas that were adopted by the campus were examining student data, technology,

lesson planning and professional development. Each day, PLCs would meet in a teacher's classroom and devote a class period to one of the above focus areas. Because professional development was one focus area for the PLCs one day each week, the campus principal determined that the primary topic would be to learn more about the teaching of writing in order to improve student performance. In addition to the PLCs that occurred daily that contained a day that would help create sustained and focused professional development for writing, the researcher created a vertical writing team that consisted of an English teacher representative from 6th-12th grade who met with her monthly to help continue the professional development work with the high school teachers and guide the community of learners through the campus PLCs. The researcher and team met every other month for an hour after school, and every other month for an entire day. The team consisted of teachers from 6th-12th grade in order to obtain support from the grades below high school so that all secondary English teachers were not only aware of the writing concerns at the high school, but also so that the English teachers below the high school level could ensure that they were learning the same things the high school teachers were learning in order to create continuity and vertical stability. In addition to these supports, the high school writing team members have attended state conferences to learn more about best practices in writing and bring that information back to each campus PLCs. An additional resource to facilitate correction of this problem was the placement of an English instructional specialist at the middle school campus to work daily with teachers in order to close some of the writing gaps in earlier grades

before students reach the high school level and high-stakes testing that determine whether or not they may graduate high school.

Collaboration efforts between the researcher and English teachers through PLCs, classroom observations, attending writing and assessment conferences, and providing district writing training in areas were used to address the concerns of students' writing improvement and the teachers' ability to deliver best practice writing instruction. District training efforts included teaching English teachers how to use the Six Traits of Writing framework within their English classes. The Six Traits of Writing framework allows for all English teachers to use the same language when teaching students important components of strong writing (Collopy, 2008, p. 165). The six traits of writing expected to be taught are: ideas, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, organization, and conventions.

Most of this history in reconciling the writing problem is known by the researcher because of direct involvement in it as it has occurred. In addition, visits with English teachers, assistant principals, and instructional specialists supports the conclusion that past attempts to address professional development for English teachers have failed and there is a need for change.

Statement of the Problem

This study involves all of the high school English teachers at WISD. There are 18 English teachers at the high school campus. These 18 teachers teach approximately 2,250 students daily. Currently, state assessments have indicated that students in the school have weak writing skills. The superintendent and assistant superintendent for

curriculum wanted to develop a plan to increase students' proficiency in writing through professional development of effective writing for WISD English teachers. Both individuals agreed to the implementation of a plan during the 2014-2015 school year to enhance teacher effectiveness in writing instruction. In addition, the principal at the high school campus assigned an assistant principal to work directly with the researcher and English department. As the researcher continued to work with stakeholders to determine viable solutions for improving the level of writing proficiency with secondary students, ongoing communication occurred with campus administrators, district writing leadership team, and English teachers to assure that students were able to write at a level that prepares them for college and a career. WISD must provide high-quality professional development for its English teachers to make certain that all teachers have a solid understanding of effective writing instruction. An effective professional development plan effort included the participation of English teachers, campus principals, and district administrators to facilitate collaboration and solidarity and positive changes in student writing.

Through several years of observing teachers as they teach writing and through grade-level team meetings, the researcher determined that the English teachers at the secondary campuses differ in their understanding and willingness to change instructional practices to improve student writing. Some teachers were in full support of changing their practices to improve students' writing proficiency; other teachers, however, did not want to change anything they were doing in their classrooms. In still other cases, teachers hesitated to teach something they did not understand and appeared apathetic

towards the problem. Finally, there was a group of teachers who desired to improve but believed that changing classroom instruction was too much to ask of them. Overall, what existed is a disparate group of English teachers who were not on the same page when it came to the severity of the problem and their perceptions of their roles in solving students' writing problems at the secondary level.

Without the entire audience of English teachers and campus principals understanding the urgency behind this problem and acceptance of their roles in alleviating the current situation of low writing proficiencies in their students, these students will continue to struggle in writing, scores will continue to decline, and many of our students would ultimately find themselves battling to finish high school and/or to find success after high school. The impact could directly extend to the teachers of these students who will eventually be evaluated on the basis of their students' writing performance. WISD needs to seriously examine the need for a new, sustained effort engaging all secondary school English teachers in developing strategies, including professional development, to eliminate the problem of students' writing deficiencies.

Purpose of the Study

This study involved a mixed-methods approach to address professional development weaknesses with the English teachers. Actions within the study were a layered approach. All teachers received professional development that focused on writing during their PLCs that met during the day. One day each week was focused on professional development for each grade level. An additional approach was to establish a writing team that worked through PLCs with the researcher in order to support all of

the English teachers and their professional development needs on a weekly basis. One teacher from each grade level was selected the semester before the study began to serve on the writing team. A final layer included instructional coaching with select teachers to add support and professional development for them. This study explored teachers' perceptions of receiving ongoing, sustained professional development, as well as their implementation of the instructional strategies and methods learned through the delivered professional development.

Research Questions

The primary question to be addressed as the focus of this study was: How do teachers respond to wanting to improve their instructional practices for teaching writing when ongoing, sustained professional development is provided? Additional research questions were:

1. What is the perception of WISD high school English teachers regarding the quality of the writing professional development they received through PLCs?
2. What differences occurred in writing instruction with four English teachers who are not on the writing team but who received professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
3. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the four teachers who are writing team members after conducting and receiving professional development through Professional Learning Communities?

4. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the three teachers who received instructional coaching in addition to writing professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
5. Did student achievement increase in writing in the 9th grade teachers' classrooms on the STAAR Writing assessment from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment?

Significance of the Study

Through researcher conversations with several WISD stakeholders, multiple perspectives that contributed to declines in students' writing scores came to light. Perspectives ranged from teachers having too much autonomy, to allowing ineffective instruction to persist, to inability to teach well, and to weak professional development. A valid perspective was that professional development has been weak and ineffective in past years. The researcher understands that "improving professional learning for educators is a crucial step in transforming schools and improving academic achievement" (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009, p. 3). Overall, the underlying concern from those involved was based on the fact that in order for students to become stronger writers, teachers have to become more effective. Teacher effectiveness can be initiated through strong and sustained professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1995).

Research shows the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Community and instructional coaching as two promising ways to help teachers grow as educators and to learn from others about the most powerful ways to reach students. This study is important because it involves working with teachers in small groups and as individuals

to model for them, teach them, learn from them, and to support them in other ways, such as providing resources and providing feedback on their progress, in order to increase the desire to improve instructional practices that will inevitably increase student achievement.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is grounded in several theories of effective writing in secondary education. Langer & Applebee (1986) proposed a theory that although writing is an individual process; teaching is a social process because it involves teacher and student. Thus, in order for the writing process to improve, teaching it as a social process between teacher and student needs to improve. Currently, there are English teachers in WISD who are not knowledgeable about how to effectively teach writing as a process. Researchers have examined what happens when people write, and the realization is that writing is a process that occurs through thinking (Reither, 1985). Therefore, teaching “prescriptive” writing does not work. Instead, teaching students to write based on critical thinking is necessary. Critical thinking must be addressed and taught in classrooms. Mehta and Al-Mahrooqi (2015) identify ways in which teachers can equip students to develop critical thinking skills. Those ways involve helping students discover prior knowledge and biases about a subject, teaching them how to address their biases through identifying sources that either support or refute the biases, and teaching them to address their beliefs with arguments that are based on readings and sources (p. 25). With strategies such as these in place for students to think critically, they can then transfer that thinking to the writing process. Mehta and Al-Mahrooqi (2015) continue to state that the thinking that occurs in writing should be based on critical reading and thinking that have occurred before the writing (p. 26). Without the critical reading and thinking prior to writing, a person is likely writing without a larger purpose in mind and

possibly with bias and undeveloped thoughts (Mehta & Al-Mahrooqi, 2015, p. 26). Once the critical thinking has been established in the writing process, the writing of a person then becomes a way to communicate with others. Writing has been clearly defined as a language process that is focused on communication (Heilman, Blair, & Rupley, 2002). Essentially, the writer is writing to communicate information to a reader. The reader's task is to reconstruct a credible understanding of the author's message (Rupley, Nichols, & Blair, 2008). Understanding the complex process of developing one's writing through the reading and critical thinking that must be a part of it, an astounding revelation is revealed that our nation's students are tremendously underdeveloped as proficient writers. Graham and Perin (2007) were a part of a national report that discussed how our nation is in a "writing proficiency crisis" (p. 3). They report that over 70% of students across the United States in grades 4-12 are not developed as writers, and they also report that nearly 50% of students who graduate high school and attend college are not ready for the level of college writing that awaits them (Graham & Perin, 2007, pp. 7-8). They also state that in order for writing proficiency to improve, "higher-order thinking about substantive material" is necessary (p. 28). WISD is no exception to this statistic as it has large numbers of students graduating annually who are able write at a minimal level of competency based on the increasing percentage of students who are not meeting minimum expectations on the exit-level writing state writing test.

The focus of this study is to determine teachers' perceptions and implementation of acquired skills and information stemming from sustained, focused professional

development in the area of writing. As the primary question for this study, “how do teachers respond to wanting to improve their instructional practices for teaching writing when ongoing, sustained professional development is provided,” the researcher gathered research pertaining to multiple areas that addressing the primary question. These areas include professional development, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), coaching, and promoting change.

Professional Development

If teachers are asked if traditional, workshop-based professional development helps them to become more effective teachers, the answer from the majority would likely be no. DuFour and Eaker (1998) state that veteran teachers are likely to respond negatively when thinking of professional development because they connect that to the traditional workshop setting where participants sit all day long and listen to someone deliver information to them (p. 255). Any educator who has attended this traditional approach to professional development can probably say the learning from the workshop never made its way into the classroom. Some of the most used traditional approaches are conferences, workshops that take place within a school day, or models that train an educator to then turn around and train other educators (Flint, Zishook, & Fisher, 2011, p. 1163).

Darling-Hammond et al. (2009a) researched the types of professional development that teachers in the United States typically receive. Their study pulled data from the 1999-2000 and the 2003-2004 staff surveys from the National Center for Education Statistics. Over time, the highest form of professional development for

teachers remained traditional settings like workshops and conferences that were reported at almost 92 % (p. 19). During the 2003-2004 school year, 83.4 % of teachers stated that their professional development related to their content area, but teachers felt the training was not very thorough (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009a, p. 20). Darling-Hammond et al. (2009a) also reported that only 59% of the teachers felt that training they received that pertained to their specific content areas was helpful (p. 21).

Following the 2003-2004 report on the status of professional development in the United States, a follow-up study was conducted by the National Staff Development Council in 2008 to see if growth had occurred with respect to professional learning. We are making progress as a nation in some areas, such as providing support and professional development to brand new teachers (Chung Wei, R., Darling-Hammond, L., & Adamson, F., 2010, p. 2). However, the follow-up study affirmed that the United States had actually declined in delivering teachers the strong, sustained professional development proven to make a difference in student achievement (Chung Wei et al., 2010, p. 1). During that time period, the nation saw little improvement in offering teachers high-quality and research-based professional development.

When professional development is delivered in what United States educators know to be traditional format, it usually consists of a training that takes place in a very short amount of time. Research shows that the intensity of professional development is linked to implementation of that training. For example, in the 2008 follow-up study on professional learning conducted by the National Staff Development Council, teachers were surveyed about the level of intensity of trainings in which they participated

involving content areas, computers, reading instruction and classroom management.

With the exception of training on computer use, the percentage of teachers reported that they received less than nine hours of training in the other three areas and it decreased from 2004 to 2008 (Chung Wei et al., 2010). Chung Wei et al. (2010) state that professional development in the United States does not exhibit the level of intensity that teachers connect to effective training that they feel is necessary to change how they teach and how students improve (p. 2).

Educators have learned a tremendous amount in the last decade about the incredible need for connecting professional learning to student learning in the classroom. They understand the need for it, and they understand that the connection from what they learn to helping students learn will increase student performance. One of the primary reasons for the lack of implementation of professional development goes back to the issue of the types of professional development that are still seen in most schools today. In order for the implementation of what was learned in professional development to occur, best practices in delivering professional development must occur. Professional development can't just be a one-day workshop. Loucks-Horsley, S., Stiles, K.E., Mundry, S., Love, N., & Hewson, P.W. (2010) note that for teacher learning to be seen in the classroom, professional development has to be designed in a way that fosters teacher learning. Teachers first have to understand that nothing is more important than ensuring that critical thinking for students is the focus for all professional development (p. 68). Teacher learning also translates to the classroom when professional development:

- Is designed to address student learning goals and needs;
- Is driven by a well-defined image of effective classroom learning and teaching;
- Provides opportunities for teachers to build their content and pedagogical content knowledge and reflect on practice;
- Is research based and engages teachers as adult learners in the learning approaches they will use with their students;
- Provides opportunities for teachers to collaborate with colleagues and other experts to improve their practice;
- Supports teachers to develop their professional expertise and to serve in leadership roles;
- Links with other parts of the education system; and
- Is continuously evaluated and improved (Loucks-Horsley, et. al., 2010, p. 68)

When teachers do not move beyond a PD that is given during one short moment in time, they often don't feel capable to try to implement what they just learned.

Time is a major factor in ensuring that teachers become effective in their classroom instruction (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Oprhanos, 2009a). Teachers must be given the time and skills to teach the students at the level they need to be taught in today's world. The definition, presented in a report for effective professional development (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009a) is that it "is intensive, ongoing, and connected to practice; focuses on the teaching and learning of specific

academic content; is connected to other school initiatives; and builds strong working relationships among teachers” (p. 5).

Professional development is often disjointed, not connected to true needs of either the teachers or the students, and is not sustaining. Chung Wei, Darling-Hammond and Adamson (2010) noted that many high-achieving nations allow for approximately “five times what U. S. teachers experience” in the way of collaborating with one another (p. 2). If teachers are to have the tools they need to ensure that students achieve academically, and “research shows that teacher quality is the single most power influence on student achievement,” (Chung et al., 2010, p. 8) then critical decisions need to be made to see this happen.

Professional Development for English Teachers

As professional development concerns with writing are addressed and remedied, student achievement will improve (Fearn & Farnan, 2007; Flint, Zisook, & Fisher, 2011). As WISD seeks to address professional development for teachers of writing so that all teachers are equipped with proper knowledge and best practices for teaching, the anticipation is that students will not only meet expectations on state writing assessments, but they will also be ready for life beyond high school.

In order to improve the quality of writing instruction in the secondary schools, teachers must be a focus. Fearn and Farnan (2007) conducted a study on professional development for teachers in writing and students’ ability to write. They used a method of teaching writing in this study called Writer’s Workshop. Writer’s Workshop is a framework for teachers to teach process writing that infuses the opportunity for students

to write for authentic audiences and purposes (Zaner-Bloser, 2015, para. 1). Teachers were trained to produce ten specified outcomes through a series of professional development sessions within a writer's workshop setting. The study focused on writing performance of students in these teachers' classes to determine if these outcomes were present in their writing. Results suggested: professional development in writing can affect all students, regardless of what they know and don't know; teachers must be able to see what good writing and writing instruction should look like in order to be effective writing teachers; and the focus of professional development truly does matter (p. 27). Collopy (2008) identified in her study that three defining characteristics for effective professional development for writing that will lead to student achievement are: training that focuses on the subject matter at hand and that addresses pedagogy within that subject, training that is ongoing and provides the support and time teachers need, and training that addresses the considerations of what the teachers have to do within their classrooms.

Another study investigating teachers' writing instruction (Troia, Lin, Cohen, & Monroe, 2011) found that most teachers use a variety of methods with which to teach writing, and they devote less than 90 minutes a week to writing in the classrooms. WISD English teachers also have historically devoted a limited amount of time to writing instruction and use various methods with which to teach, so they are no exception to this problem of too many methods and not enough writing time in the classrooms. Many of the credible reasons for students' poor writing performance link back to lack of effective professional development that equips teachers with practices

and support to enhance the quality of their writing instruction. Writing teachers often teach differently based on factors such as their confidence, experience, and knowledge of writing (Fleischer, 2004; Limbrick, Buchanan, Goodwin, & Schwarcz, 2010). Professional development that addresses teachers' confidence as a writing teacher and their knowledge about writing could be an approach that allows teachers to reflect on their own teaching practices and why they teach writing the way they do. Furthermore, it can be reasoned that a reciprocal influence could operate in terms of teachers' acquiring and implementing knowledge of effective instruction leads to greater confidence that leads to honing their knowledge. Support for such reasoning was addressed in a study (Limbrick et al., 2010) where teachers were challenged with examining their own teaching practices for writing through an inquiry-based professional development approach. The reflective inquiry process in which these teachers participated increased their confidence as teachers, and it had a positive impact on those who teach writing.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities are not a new concept for educators today. Most schools adopt a mission or vision that refers to creating a supportive and encouraging environment for learning, but far too often, schools do not include the idea that teachers are a part of that learning (DuFour, 2004). When teachers realize they are learners as well, they understand that "the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn" (Dufour, 2004, p. 7). As stated earlier, critical thinking is the key to learning, including becoming a strong writer.

In order for teachers and students to learn, reflective and critical thinking becomes essential. A powerful explanation of critical thinking comes from Sarason (2004) as he breaks down what people mean when they refer to how we think critically. Through his explanation on how and when critical thinking begins, he refers to critical thinking in schools by stating that “teachers teach the way they were taught to teach, and the nature and power of the school culture reinforce what they were taught in preparatory programs” (p. 72). He continues to examine the reason for why we have our current situation with discussions and disagreements regarding critical thinking occurring in the classrooms across the country. If we trace the dilemma back to the fact that teachers teach the way they were taught, and we add the fact that standards and accountability have driven school systems for two decades, Sarason (2004) feels that the advancement of having standards and accountability has reduced the discussion and exploration of critical thinking in schools (p. 74). In other words, he feels that critical thinking is something schools can focus on after students meet standards and pass tests (p. 74).

Regardless of one’s agreement with Sarason’s statements, critical thinking is still a discussion in schools year after year. We are reminded, “if we want all young people to possess the higher-order thinking skills they need to succeed in the 21st century, we need educators who possess higher-order teaching skills and deep content knowledge” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009b, p. 2). This link between teachers using higher level thinking skills and doing so within a setting that promotes learning can be done within PLCs. Although research may be lacking on effective critical thinking strategies for students, there is a tremendous amount of information on the effective use of PLCs

where teachers use their own critical thinking skills to examine their classroom practices to determine whether or not they are pushing students to think at a much higher level than what normally happens in classrooms. The research and definitions on PLCs are many, Newmann and Wehlage feel that most of the common components of an effective PLC are that the teachers have a common purpose for how students learn, teachers work together towards that purpose, and teachers all agree that they work as a team in order to see students learn (as cited in Blankstein, 2004, p. 53).

When components of a PLC are in place, and all teachers are invested in the idea of a learning community, few professional development models can compare. The need for PLCs is imminent, especially since public schools have spent so much time using professional development models that produce poor results (Schmoker, 2006, p. 108). Because teachers know that traditional approaches to professional development are not effective, they can establish and invest in PLCs. They can realize that they can work together to make positive changes in their classrooms. Through traditional professional development, teachers sometimes receive the message that they must attend training that often doesn't pertain to their needs because they do not know about curriculum or instruction (Chung Wei, et al., 2010, p. 4). With respect to having the experience, knowledge and skills to be effective educators, Schmoker (2006) feels that "teachers do have this capability--if, that is, they pool their practical knowledge by working in teams" (p. 109). Referring back to the components of a strong and effective PLC, teachers can be game changers in schools so that authentic student engagement and improvement is evident.

Effective PLCs ensure that support and training are ongoing and long-term. Many factors are central in creating the time for all teachers to come together as a learning community. Once leaders have determined how to handle factors and provide PLCs for teachers, there are strategies that need to be in place to assure that learning is occurring. Jaquith (2013) feels that in order for PLCs to function as they should, leaders of schools must make sure they do function by fostering an environment that promotes collegiality and the idea that teachers learn from teachers (p. 57). Giving teachers the time is one large hurdle, but that does not guarantee that what needs to occur within that time frame will actually occur without leadership creating a culture and putting systems in place that foster a learning environment. As PLCs are implemented effectively, professional growth can occur as teachers understand that this environment fosters learning from one another on a daily basis.

Instructional Coaching

Coaching is seen as a powerful and highly effective way in helping teachers implement new learning into their classrooms and promote sustained professional development. Lotter, Yow, and Peters (2014) conducted a study concerning the impact of instructional coaches with middle school teachers in order to see if coaching affected instructional practices. In addition to building community amongst those teachers involved, the results indicated that when both coaches and teachers work together in a way that promotes inquiry through critical reflection of one's practices, teachers are more likely to make connections between their instruction and the inquiry process they are learning through coaching and will make that a part of their own daily routine (p.

18). Likewise, Teemant (2013) conducted a mixed-method study to evaluate whether or not instructional coaching contributed to pedagogical changes in teachers. This study, involving 36 teachers, found that coaching does impact teachers' attitudes and how students perform (p.600). Instructional coaches who work to help teachers improve their instructional practices can be a strong professional development addition to a school.

When implementing instructional coaches in a school, campus leaders must make sure that they choose people for these roles who are equipped to coach others. Loucks-Horsley et al. (2010), identify five key elements of coaching:

- Teachers focus on learning or improvement;
- A climate of trust, collegiality, and continuous growth is cultivated;
- Coaches are well prepared with in-depth content knowledge and adult learning skills;
- Mechanisms for observing practice and providing feedback are critical; and
- Opportunities for interaction are provided (p. 226).

Individuals who have relationship skills, an ability to foster trust, a strong knowledge base of experiences, and communication skills, can be effective coaches for teachers.

Anderson, Feldman, and Minstrell (2014) studied the trust relationship between instructional coaches and teachers and found a relationship between stronger teaching practices and the time spent between teachers and their coaches (p. 2). As those coaches begin to work with teachers, transfer of learning will take place. Teachers will use their new learning more frequently, they will retain their new skills longer, and they will have

a greater understanding of why their practices needed to change (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Instructional coaching can focus on many different aspects of education, but Knight (2009b) narrows down a framework that creates a focus on four key areas: classroom management, content planning, instruction and assessment for learning. As instructional coaches develop a trusting relationship with teachers and use a framework such as this, they can identify critical areas that need attention. With an ongoing collegial relationship, and a focus for planning what needs to be addressed, teaching practices improve; therefore, students are in an environment designed for learning.

Promoting and Embracing Change

Ongoing and sustained professional development directly connects to teaching practices in ways that improve student achievement. Allowing for the time it takes to help teachers positively change their teaching practices is important. Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, and Shapley (2007) evaluated more than 1,300 studies that addressed teacher staff development, and only 9 of them met the standard of the *What Works Clearinghouse Evidence Standards* and prove that they have a direct correlation between intense and ongoing professional development and student achievement. From these nine studies, the average amount of time teachers received professional development was 49 hours during a 6-12 month time period (p. 1). When teachers receive training that is effective and targeted, and that training occurs for more than a one-day session, teaching practices can change.

Other reports support the fact that professional development should be long term. Teachers need nearly 50 hours of sustained professional development in order to see student achievement gains (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009a; Yoon et al., 2007). In 2003-2004, the Schools and Staffing Survey reported that more than 50% of teachers received less than 16 hours of professional development during a one-year time period (Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009a, p. 5). When professional development is left unfocused and limited in this way, schools revisit the problem of having traditional approaches to teacher learning that are not connected to student learning. Therefore, change is likely to not occur in teaching practices or in student achievement.

Long-term and sustained professional development allows for teachers to examine their current practices and to change them in order to improve in the classroom for the benefit of students. When teachers follow research-driven approaches to professional development that involves ongoing training, they are able to reflect on why they do what they do and believe what they believe as educators (Limbrick, Buchanan, Goodwin, & Schwarcz, 2010, p. 904). The opportunity to reflect and challenge one's practices occurs over time as teachers learn more about their content, pedagogy, best practices, and how all of it relates to their present way of teaching.

As previously stated, the establishment of PLCs is a critical component of sustained professional development. PLCs can also help in promoting change and can lead to effective professional development. Prytula's (2012) study of teachers' metacognition within a PLC environment determined that teachers were able to recognize when they were thinking through their own teaching practices and why

adjustments should be made in their teaching (p. 118). When teachers have time to gather as a community and to reflect on their teaching, they are able to better learn from one another and discern what changes they need to make as individuals. This study also revealed that the leaders of PLCs were also aware of their own metacognition as they learned and led other teachers (p. 118). Teacher leaders help promote positive change when they understand best practices and can lead their teams in that direction.

Change for many teachers can be very difficult. However, Darling-Hammond (1995) feels that changes in schools occur when teachers have an environment that allows them to work together in ways that promote student achievement (p. 12). In order for teachers to utilize PLCs in a way that produces the desired results for students, they must work together and support one another to implement needed instructional changes. Teachers are in a profession where change is common, occurs frequently and does not last long; therefore, teachers do not always want to accept that change is needed (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 65). Lewis (2011) states that “communication plays a critical role in fostering the fad of change in organizations” (p. 22). The reason for needed instructional changes must be communicated clearly and well to teachers in order for them to buy in to change and to understand consequences of not changing.

Graham and Perin (2007) stress the need for schools to seek out information that will improve classroom writing and therefore increase writing proficiency among adolescents (p. 8). WISD has recently dedicated PLCs as a means to enhance the quality of classroom instruction. PLCs are one professional development method that allows teachers to work together professionally in order to build a community of learners. This

collaboration is what determines whether or not PLCs will be successful in bringing about the quality and positive production of a group of teachers (Wells &Feun, 2008, p. 44).

Coaching is a way to support teachers to make positive changes in their classrooms. Instructional coaching does not happen one time. It is an ongoing relationship between the teacher and the coach, whereby the two are partners looking to improve classroom instruction all for the benefit of students (Knight, 2009a). WISD continuously focuses on building trust between teachers and specialists all to benefit student performance.

WISD realizes the need for more time for teachers in the district to plan for instruction and to receive professional development and implemented Professional Learning Communities. This decision has greatly increased the opportunity for teachers to be taught skills they need to become more effective teachers and to learn from one another. When teachers understand and adopt the idea that their professional development and preparedness for students who come to them to learn is the key to “educational reform,” positive results will take place (Darling-Hammond, 1995, p. 10).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The 81st Texas Legislature decided in 2009 through House Bill 3 that the STAAR test would replace the TAKS test in order to create a more rigorous assessment that was aligned to state standards, ensure that the state was measuring students' postsecondary readiness, and help determine as early as possible whether or not students were "on track" to be successful as they moved from grade to grade (TEA, 2014c, p. 78). WISD has been working since then to address areas that are weak in performance, including writing. The school district administrators have supported the plan to work with English teachers at the high school level to increase student performance through the implementation of PLCs, instructional coaching, and establishment of a vertical writing team that includes English teachers from grades 6-12.

This study involved a mixed-method approach of collecting data in order to analyze the effects of professional development provided to English teachers at the high school in WISD. The first level of support for these teachers involved a weekly PLC each Friday for 45 minutes dedicated to the professional development topics of improving writing instruction and the environment of the writing classroom. The professional development time was led by either the researcher, a member of the secondary writing team, or by an outside consultant who was an expert in writing. An additional layer of professional development was added by involving 4 of the 18 English teachers from the high school on a vertical writing team that also included teacher

representatives from grades 6, 7 and 8. This team spent an average of six hours each month, face-to-face, working on district writing goals that pertained to the following:

- Developing an action plan to improve weakest areas of writing, such as revising expository text and editing for capitalization, punctuation, and spelling
- Reviewing the Texas Education Agency's guidance on using the state's writing rubrics
- Focusing on the culture of the writing classroom and examining articles that support ways to change classroom culture
- Researching best practices and developing lessons to share with teachers using those best practices
- Observing teachers throughout the district to note strong instruction versus weaker instruction
- Reviewing formative and summative data, such as STAAR tests, monthly checkpoints, and student and teacher surveys
- Practicing with writing calibration activities to improve understanding of what good writing looks like
- Developing professional development in areas of writing requested by teachers

A final layer of support was designed for 3 of the 18 English teachers at the high school who voluntarily participated in an instructional coaching program. This program was to further strengthen the implementation of the professional development learned through PLCs and to focus on specific goals each teacher had for his or her classroom. The goals for these three teachers focused on student engagement during writing instruction,

incorporating writing instruction that was effective and research-based, and providing structure for student writers of all abilities. These 3 teachers worked for a total of 10 weeks and approximately 2-4 hours each week with either the researcher who served as their instructional coach or on their own time. Table 3.1 displays these ten weeks and the schedule the teachers and the researcher followed.

Table 3.1 Ten-Week Schedules for Teachers and Instructional Coach

Week	Focus	Activity
1	Observation and video recording by instructional coach	Coach observed teacher in class and took observation notes. Recording was left with teacher to view and reflect on using Reflection Form (Appendix E)
2	Coaching session with each teacher	Coach met with each teacher to review notes and reflections from last week's recorded lesson. Goals were discussed and suggestions were made for classroom instruction.
3	Observation and video recording by instructional coach	Coach observed teacher in class and took observation notes. Recording was left with teacher to view and reflect on using Reflection Form (Appendix E)
4	Coaching session with each teacher	Coach met with each teacher to review notes and reflections from last week's recorded lesson. Goals were discussed and suggestions were made for classroom instruction.

Table 3.1 Continued

Week	Focus	Activity
5	Observation and video recording by instructional coach	Coach observed teacher in class and took observation notes. Recording was left with teacher to view and reflect on using Reflection Form (Appendix E)
6	Coaching session with each teacher	Coach met with each teacher to review notes and reflections from last week's recorded lesson. Goals were discussed and suggestions were made for classroom instruction.
7	Observation and video recording by instructional coach	Coach observed teacher in class and took observation notes. Recording was left with teacher to view and reflect on using Reflection Form (Appendix E)
8	Coaching session with each teacher	Coach met with each teacher to review notes and reflections from last week's recorded lesson. Goals were discussed and suggestions were made for classroom instruction.
9	Observation and video recording by instructional coach	Coach observed teacher in class and took observation notes. Recording was left with teacher to view and reflect on using Reflection Form (Appendix E)
10	Final meeting with coach and each teacher	Coach met with each teacher and reviewed entire coaching experience. Coach also used interview instrument (Appendix F) to gather data on teachers' experience.

Research Questions

The primary question to be addressed was: Do teachers want to improve their instructional practices for teaching writing when ongoing, sustained professional development is provided? Additional research questions were:

1. What is the perception of WISD high school English teachers regarding the quality of the writing professional development they received through PLCs?
2. What differences occurred in writing instruction with four English teachers who are not on the writing team but who received professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
3. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the four teachers who are writing team members after conducting and receiving professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
4. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the three teachers who received instructional coaching in addition to writing professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
5. Did student achievement increase in writing in the 9th grade teachers' classrooms on the STAAR Writing assessment from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment?

Design of the Study

A mixed-methods approach was used in this study to answer the research questions. Mixed methods were deemed most appropriate in order to combine both qualitative and quantitative data to triangulate data sources in an effort to reduce bias

and weaknesses in both forms of data (Creswell, 2014, p. 15). Specifically, this was an embedded design (Creswell, Plano Clark, et al., 2003) by collecting both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously. Qualitative data were collected, or “nested” (Creswell, Plano Clark, et al., 2003, p. 184) within the quantitative data in order to combine and analyze these data to determine a more accurate conclusion of whether or not the study’s results showed a change in teachers’ classroom practices in the area of teaching writing. In a design such as this, “nesting may mean that the embedded method addresses a question different from that addressed by the dominant method or that the embedded method seeks information from different levels” (Creswell, Plano Clark, et al., 2003, p. 184). The qualitative data were to determine teachers’ perceptions about all forms of writing professional development they received. The quantitative data within this study sought to determine whether or not teachers implemented PD strategies and if these then affected students’ writing performance.

The qualitative data within this study were framed using a case study that included a true setting within the high school of WISD (Yin, 2009). A case study occurs when the “investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a *case*) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). A case study approach for the qualitative data was chosen for this study due to the researcher’s role in the study. The researcher was involved in all aspects of the problem and the solution. A specific, identified problem was determined (a case), and multiple data sources were analyzed. This case was within a bounded system, which is “bounded by time and

place” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). The bounded system involved the 18 English teachers at the high school of WISD.

Participants

This study took place at the WISD high school, which is the only high school in the district. This particular campus first opened in the fall of 2003, and it served 2,218 students at the time of the research study. On the Texas Academic Performance Report published by TEA (2014d), the percentage of economically disadvantaged students on the campus was 24.4%, and the percentage of students identified as at-risk was 27.6%. The ethnic breakdown of students was 13.7% African American, 19.8% Hispanic, 58.4% White, 1% American Indian, 5% Asian, and 2.1% two or more races.

All 18 English teachers at the high school voluntarily participated in this study as a part of their standard expectations for professional development from the campus and district administrators. All teachers knew that expectations were to improve their quality of writing instruction in order to improve students’ writing achievement. Furthermore, they knew that data would be collected and used to identify strategies to enhance the quality of writing instruction. The three teachers who participated in the instructional coaching program as a part of this study also did so voluntarily. The researcher prior to this study selected the four teachers who participated on the district writing team. They voluntarily participated in the data collected for this study.

Of the teachers involved in this study, five taught ninth grade English, four taught tenth grade English, three taught eleventh grade English, four taught twelfth grade English, and two served as academic intervention English teachers. Intervention teachers

supplement the English class for students who failed one or more of the state assessments for English. Table 3.2 below explains the breakdown of education, gender and years of experience for all teachers involved in this study. The researcher, the writing team members, and an outside writing expert conducted the professional development through PLCs. The researcher conducted the coaching.

The selection of 18 English teachers was optimal due to the focus for the district prior to the study, which was to improve writing instruction by teachers and subsequently writing performance by students on state assessments. The district and campus administration directed this focus.

Table 3.2 English Teacher Breakdown

Teaching Position	Gender	Education Level	Years Teaching
9 th Grade Teacher 1	Female	Bachelor's Degree	14
9 th Grade Teacher 2	Female	Bachelor's Degree	2
9 th Grade Teacher 3	Female	Bachelor's Degree	4
9 th Grade Teacher 4	Female	Bachelor's Degree	18
9 th Grade Teacher 5	Female	Bachelor's Degree	29
10 th Grade Teacher 1	Female	Bachelor's Degree	6
10 th Grade Teacher 2	Female	Bachelor's Degree	10
10 th Grade Teacher 3	Female	Bachelor's Degree	17
10 th Grade Teacher 4	Male	Bachelor's Degree	1
11 th Grade Teacher 1	Female	Bachelor's Degree	37
11 th Grade Teacher 2	Male	Master's Degree	5
11 th Grade Teacher 3	Female	Bachelor's Degree	16
12 th Grade Teacher 1	Female	Master's Degree	26
12 th Grade Teacher 2	Male	Bachelor's Degree	8
12 th Grade Teacher 3	Male	Master's Degree	7
12 th Grade Teacher 4	Female	Master's Degree	15
Academic Intervention Teacher 1	Female	Bachelor's Degree	5
Academic Intervention Teacher 1	Female	Bachelor's Degree	24

This group of teachers exhibit a wide variety of teaching experience, most experienced teacher having taught for 37 years and least experienced teacher having taught for one year. Four of the teachers were male, and 14 were female. The teaching experience for these teachers averaged 13.4 years.

Methods

Within this mixed-methods study, different data sources were used in order to answer each research question.

1. What is the perception of WISD high school English teachers regarding the quality of the writing professional development they received through PLCs?

At the beginning of the study, all teachers were given a preliminary survey to identify the types of writing topics they wished to explore (Appendix A). This survey presented twelve common writing topics to rank and space to list additional writing topics.

Teachers were to rank each topic as a high, medium or low priority. The top six topics became focus areas for professional development during PLCs. The top six topics were: writing calibration, effective instruction for struggling writers, mentor text to model good writing (such as published pieces of literary or informational text), conferencing with students, teaching grammar through writing, and integrating reading and writing.

Two primary pieces of data were collected to gain insight into teachers' perceptions of the professional development offered at the end of the study. First, the researcher utilized an observation protocol for PLCs in order to observe behaviors and comments made during each professional development session provided each week for the English teachers. The observation protocol involved both descriptive and reflective notes taken

by the researcher (Creswell, 2013, p. 169) (Appendix B). The researcher took observation data from each PLC and developed codes that were used to determine themes or patterns in teachers' behaviors and comments (Creswell, 2013). There were a total of seven PLCs for each grade level where the observation protocol was used. The second piece of data used to gain insight into the teachers' perceptions of the professional development offered was a survey at the end of the study. The survey contained 10 questions that focused on the types of professional development offered, teachers' feelings about being involved as participants, the use of strategies and information that had been given to them, whether or not they feel they need more support, and their perceptions of the writing team that helped to deliver professional development. All questions were based on a Likert scale with four options for response: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree (Appendix C). Four of the questions also contained an open-ended response to further elaborate on the feelings about that particular question.

The next three research questions were addressed simultaneously:

2. What differences occurred in writing instruction with four English teachers who are not on the writing team but who received professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
3. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the four teachers who are writing team members after conducting and receiving professional development through Professional Learning Communities?

4. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the three teachers who received instructional coaching in addition to writing professional development through Professional Learning Communities?

To determine answers to these research questions, the primary data source used was the 360° Walkthrough Observation form used by all administrators in the district (Appendix D). This instrument was designed by the Region 20 Education Service Center in San Antonio, Texas, in 2007. All administrators have been trained to use this instrument for all observations in the district, and this instrument has been used on a weekly basis for the last three school years. Observation data collected by using the 360° Walkthrough instrument are based on four over-arching categories that pertain to what students are doing in classrooms:

1. Learning process—learner engagement, success in learning, critical thinking and problem solving through level of cognition, self-direction, and connecting learning;
2. Learner-centered instruction—goals and objectives, learner-centered instruction, motivational strategies, curriculum alignment and pacing, appropriate questioning and inquiry, use of technology and tools;
3. Learner progress—monitoring and assessing, alignment of assessment and instruction, appropriate assessment for all students, reinforced learning, constructive feedback, and relearning or reevaluating;
4. Learner management—discipline procedures, self-direction, equitable student-teacher interactions, expectations for behaviors, redirection for disruptive

behavior, reinforcement of desired behavior, equitable and various instructional materials, and management of time and materials; and

5. High-yield strategies/best practices such as cooperative groups, note taking, non-linguistic representations, graphic organizers, brainstorming, modeling, manipulatives, setting objectives, reinforcing efforts, and word walls.

For the purposes of this study, only specific areas within the district observation instrument were of focus because they aligned with the professional development topics provided during PLCs. Those focus areas analyzed were:

1. Learning process—learner engagement and critical thinking and problem solving through level of cognition (specifically, synthesis and evaluative levels).
2. Learner-centered instruction—motivational strategies used to teach writing.
3. Learner progress—monitoring and assessing students writing, appropriate assessment for all students (specifically, meeting the needs of struggling writers), and constructive feedback for students and their writing.
4. High-yield strategies/best practices such as use of graphic organizers, brainstorming, modeling, setting objectives, and reinforcing writing efforts of students.

Within the three groups, all teachers had received the professional development delivered weekly through their PLCs. The first group received weekly professional development, and participants in this group were teachers chosen to be a part of the district vertical writing team. The second group received only weekly professional development. The third group received weekly professional development just as the first

two groups. In addition to their professional development, they worked with the researcher who served as an instructional coach for 10 weeks during the 15-week time period of this study.

Observation data were collected during unannounced walkthroughs and used to compare the three groups of teachers to determine the effects of the writing PD. The 360° Walkthrough Observation form (Appendix D) was used to create consistency across all observations. In addition to using the observation form for the teachers receiving coaching as a pre- and post-observation, the researcher recorded five observations using the teacher's personal iPad. Teachers' evaluated and reflected on their lessons using these recorded observations for viewing. In between each recorded lesson, the researcher met with each of these teachers individually to discuss and reflect on the taught lesson. The teachers were also to complete a Lesson Reflection Form (Hasbrouck & Denton, 2005, p. 157) prior to each meeting (Appendix E). Using the recording, the lesson reflection, and the observation notes, the researcher (instructional coach) and the teacher would determine a plan for the next observed lesson. At the end of the study, the researcher requested to meet with each teacher individually to interview them (Appendix F). Interviews and reflection forms were transcribed, analyzed and coded to determine themes or categories for the coaching experience.

The last research question to be addressed was:

5. Did student achievement increase in writing in the 9th grade teachers' classrooms on the STAAR Writing assessment from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment?

There was a total of 630 students who took a released English I STAAR assessment as a pre-test prior to this study and the English I STAAR assessment in April as the post-assessment. The focus areas for analysis on both the pre-test and post-test were: overall revision of text, editing of text, revision of expository text, editing of sentence structure, editing of punctuation, and editing of spelling.

The study took place over fifteen weeks between January 2015 and May 2015 where both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Table 3.3 describes the timeline of data collection and type of data collected.

Table 3.3 Data Collection

Method of Data Collection	Instrument for Data Collection	Participants in Data Collection	Week of Data Collection
Quantitative	360° Walkthrough Form (Pre-Observation)	All English teachers involved in comparison groups for study	Week 1
Quantitative	STAAR Released Test	All 9 th Grade students	Week 1
Qualitative	Coaching Reflection Form	Teachers being coached	Week 2
Qualitative	PLC Observation Protocol	All English teachers	Week 3
Qualitative	Coaching Reflection Form	Teachers being coached	Week 4
Qualitative	PLC Observation Protocol	All English teachers	Week 5
Qualitative	PLC Observation Protocol	All English teachers	Week 6
Qualitative	PLC Observation Protocol	All English teachers	Week 7
Qualitative	PLC Observation Protocol	All English teachers	Week 8

Table 3.3 Continued

Method of Data Collection	Instrument for Data Collection	Participants in Data Collection	Week of Data Collection
Qualitative	Coaching Reflection Form	Teachers being coached	Week 8
No data collected	PLCs Did Not Meet		Week 9
Qualitative	Coaching Reflection Form	Teachers being coached	Week 10
No data collected	PLCs Did Not Meet		Week 11
Qualitative	PLC Observation Protocol	All English teachers	Week 12
No data collected	STAAR Testing Week		Week 13
Quantitative	360° Walkthrough Form (Post Observation)	All English teachers involved in observation for study	Week 14
Qualitative	PLC Observation Protocol	All English teachers	Week 15
Qualitative	Professional Development Survey by SurveyMonkey	All English teachers	Week 15
Qualitative	Final Interview	Teachers being coached	Week 15
Quantitative	STAAR Results	All 9 th grade English teachers	Week 15

Researcher Qualifications

The researcher currently serves in the role of Secondary English Language Arts Coordinator WISD. Within this role, she is responsible for the district curriculum and instruction in the secondary English language arts and reading classrooms, which encompasses grades 5-12. Along with the curriculum and instruction, she also oversees

the RTI (Response to Intervention) process for reading at the secondary level. RTI is a system for intervening as early as possible with students who are at risk of failure. The system involves a collaboration between teachers, specialists, and other educators and is designed to monitor the progress of students in order to determine if they are making educational gains through prescribed interventions (Crepeau-Hobson & Bianco, 2015, p. 144). She works with principals and teachers to effectively identify struggling learners and intervene early and appropriately. In addition, the researcher works closely with the district's Elementary English Language Arts Coordinator to provide ongoing professional development and training for all principals, teachers and other instructional personnel.

The researcher is vested in assuring WISD students graduate with the writing skills necessary to be successful in college and in a career. She has been in education for 20 years and was a classroom English teacher for the first part of her career. She has knowledge and training in Writer's Workshop and in Six Traits Writing, both of which are a framework for providing students skills needed for writing and a method in which to learn those skills. She was an English teacher for five years, a librarian for six years, the State and Federal Programs Coordinator for three years, and for the past six years has been the Secondary English Language Arts Coordinator. Within her current role, she has helped to implement RTI at the secondary level for struggling readers and writers, has created the scope and sequence for English Language Arts at the secondary level, and has provided ongoing professional development for teachers. Her training and experience in English Language Arts is the basis and support for this study.

Limitations

Within this study, there were two limitations. The first limitation involves the researcher as a district-level administrator. Although the researcher does not directly supervise any teachers, she is an administrator, which could have affected the behaviors and attitudes of teachers. Efforts were made to ensure that the involvement of the researcher throughout the time frame of this study was identical to her interaction with the teachers on a regular basis. The researcher was previously involved with a district writing team and with teachers weekly in PLCs. The likelihood that teachers said or did anything different from what they would normally do outside of this study was addressed by conducting PLCs in normal locations of teachers' classrooms and by ensuring that the schedules did not change in any way, these efforts reduced.

Another limitation was the sample size of this study. The study involved 18 teachers, and the comparison groups for improvement were broken into groups of 4, 4 and 3. Small sample sizes, such as the one in this study, may reduce the reliability and validity of the results and may not be generalizable to a larger population (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The primary purpose of this mixed methods was three-fold to: 1) determine WISD high school English teachers' perceptions of PLCs professional development in writing instruction 2) determine whether or not teachers implemented newly-learned writing strategies into their classroom instruction, and (3) determine if students' writing capabilities improved. Information gained from this study can impact both the quality and effectiveness of WISD writing instruction. Furthermore, it can contribute to the extant body of literature on ongoing professional development strategies.

The research questions were:

1. What is the perception of WISD high school English teachers regarding the quality of the writing professional development they received through PLCs?
2. What differences occurred in writing instruction with four English teachers who are not on the writing team but who received professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
3. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the four teachers who are writing team members after conducting and receiving professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
4. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the three teachers who received instructional coaching in addition to writing professional development through Professional Learning Communities?

5. Did student achievement increase in writing in the 9th grade teachers' classrooms on the STAAR Writing assessment from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment?

Methodology Summary

This study analyzed seven different sources of quantitative and qualitative data to determine teachers' perceptions and implementations of professional development in writing instruction. Qualitative data were collected through an observation protocol used during PLCs to document teachers' behaviors and comments regarding professional development and teachers' perceptions of the quality, usefulness and importance of the training they received throughout the semester. Qualitative data were also collected using reflective forms completed after every coaching observation, and researcher interviews completed at the end of the coaching cycle. In addition, qualitative data were gathered at the end of the semester through administration of a survey of teachers' perceptions about the PD. Quantitative data were collected through pre- and post-observations (four writing team and, four non-writing team teachers), three teachers who received additional coaching, and students' pre- post-test writing growth as measured by the STAAR writing assessment results of the 9th grade team.

Data Analysis for Research Question 1

Reflection notes about WISD's quality of the writing PD were recorded during PLCs in order to determine teachers' behaviors and implementation of professional development being offered. In addition, a voluntary survey was given at the end of the study period, and all 18 English teachers were invited to partake of the survey in order to

give their feedback and perceptions regarding the professional development that had been offered throughout the semester.

The reflection notes were analyzed using a constant comparative method (Creswell, 2013), whereby the data collected were used to determine “emerging categories” based on what the teachers said and the behavior they exhibited during their PLCs that involved professional development (p. 86). During the 15-week study period, there were 28 PLC observations by the researcher. Table 4.1 reflects the writing professional development topics that were shared throughout observation time period.

Table 4.1 Writing Professional Development Topics

PLC Week	Writing Topic
Week 1	Writing Calibration
Week 2	Writing Instruction for Struggling Learners
Week 3	Writing Conferences
Week 4	Integrating Reading and Writing
Week 5	Using Mentor Text to Teach Writing
Week 6	Integrating Grammar and Writing
Week 7	Planning Future Writing Instruction

The researcher analyzed all 28 observation protocols for evidence of language or behaviors that could be coded into broader categories in order to determine themes that

emerged from the protocols. As the researcher reviewed and examined all protocols, three primary categories emerged as focus areas, or themes: collaboration, attitude of learning, and a willingness to try something new based on what was being learned. Through descriptive and reflective notes taken during each PLC by the researcher, these themes emerged as teachers both responded to professional development being given either through body language or through verbal responses both during and after the professional development was given. As the protocols were analyzed, and these themes emerged, a coding system was created that identified verbal and body language that fell into one of the three areas.

Collaboration

One of the primary themes to emerge with the observation protocol used during the 28 PLC observations was the idea of collaboration. Both words and behaviors became evident with respect to collaboration. Table 4.2 provides a visual representation of the verbal and body language identified by the researcher in her notes in the PLCs that were used to identify the theme of collaboration.

Table 4.2 Verbal and Body Language Used to Identify Theme of Collaboration

Body Language	Verbal Language
All teachers participated.	Everyone agreed
Every team member participated.	Conversation was powerful
Calibrated	Good discussion
Shared	All agreed and discussed ways.

Table 4.2 Continued

Body Language	Verbal Language
Fully Participated	Eager to share
Everyone was involved.	Interjected different things
Continuously collaborative	All agreed
Several teachers sharing ways they model.	
Eagerly participated	

Attitude of Learning

Another primary theme to emerge with the observation protocol used during the 28 PLC observations was the idea of having an attitude of learning. With this theme, positive and negative words and behaviors became evident with respect to positive attitude. Table 4.3 provides a visual representation of the verbal and body language identified by the researcher in her notes in the PLCs that were used to identify the theme of attitude of learning. Data were divided with positive and negative behaviors that are displayed below.

Table 4.3 Verbal and Body Language Used to Identify Theme of Attitude of Learning

Body Language		Verbal Language	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Every team member was very positive.	One teacher did not bring any writing samples with her, even though all were asked to bring them.	Teachers asked great questions.	One teacher repeatedly does not offer any information, questions or advice.
Both teachers took notes during the presentation.	Unspoken tension among the group	Several commented liking the checklist.	One teacher responded fairly negatively.
All teachers were very attentive.	Two teachers seemed to be less engaged than others based on eye contact with the presenter.	This group is very good about asking questions.	Many comments were negative.
All teachers were attentive.	This group's demeanor tends to send messages that they don't feel these PLCs are important.	Everyone in the group shared at least one idea.	They all groaned saying they had already done these.
She nodded in agreement through the conversation.	Eye rolling and body posture/language	They shared great ideas for next year.	One teacher complained that there isn't anything artistic for students to do on the list given.
This group was very attentive.			
Both teachers were attentive and participatory.			
Group's demeanor was very positive and agreeable.			
All teachers paid attention.			

Table 4.3 Continued

Body Language		Verbal Language	
Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Generally very positive			
Always the most positive			
They were very positive			

Willingness to Try Something New

A final theme that emerged with the observation protocol used during the 28 PLC observations was the idea of teachers being willing to try something new in their writing instruction. Teachers again used both body and verbal language to indicate whether or not they were willing to consider any of the new strategies or ideas pertaining to writing instruction in their classrooms. Table 4.4 provides a visual representation of the verbal and body language identified by the researcher in her notes in the PLCs that were used to identify the theme of willingness to try something new.

Table 4.4 Verbal and Body Language Used to Identify Theme of Willingness to Try Something New

Body Language	Verbal Language
They felt it was extremely valuable.	Teachers asked great questions about how to help students and how to teach them to know how to connect their writing to a bigger idea or concept.

Table 4.4 Continued

Body Language	Verbal Language
They seemed to find the experience valuable.	They all discussed ways they would try to work around those barriers.
Several were taking notes.	He admitted that he has not conference with students but wants to start trying.
There were two teachers taking notes.	He suggested beginning a blog with a unit.
They like to share with one another and to learn new ideas.	They shared reasons and ways for using both ideas.
They were very interested and want to try to do some of these things.	They were interested in some of the other ideas.
	This teacher said he might think about doing that next year with his students to interact more with them.
	They shared great ideas for what they want to do in the final six weeks of this year with a reading selection that can incorporate one or more of the integration ideas.
	Teachers discussed which pieces they have done before that would work well for different integration activities.
	She did try conferencing this past week and felt that 1 on 1 conferencing was effective.
	She said she is going to focus on one area of improvement with students in her next conferences.
	One teacher said he doesn't really use mentor text like he desires, so he is going to try to incorporate that more.

Table 4.4 Continued

Body Language	Verbal Language
	They all agreed that looking at their final novel is a good place of focus for implementing some of their learned strategies.
	He wants to do more reading and writing in the classroom while his students do that so he can model that for them.
	They want to consider focusing on mentor text for the final six weeks.
	Two said they haven't done it as much as they would like, but they want to try.

Following this analysis, the researcher took the survey that all teachers were invited to take and analyzed those results to determine if there was a correlation between what was seen in PLCs and what was shared in the survey. The researcher analyzed the survey and the observations together by comparing the behaviors and comments recorded in PLCs with the outcomes of each of the survey questions. Out of the 18 teachers who participated in the weekly professional development through PLCs, 15 completed the survey, and three did not. The survey contained 10 questions; each was based on a Likert scale with four options for response: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree (Appendix C). Table 4.5 provides a summary of the results of the teacher responses to the survey containing their perceptions on the professional development they received.

Table 4.5 Summary of Teachers' Responses to Final Survey

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	5	10	0	0
2	6	8	1	0
3	5	10	0	0
4	4	8	3	0
5	0	4	9	0
6	7	8	0	0
7	8	7	0	0
8*	5	9	0	0
9	5	9	1	0
10	6	5	4	0

*Teacher skipped question

Out of the 15 teachers who participated in the survey, all of them indicated on five of the survey questions that they either strongly agreed or agreed with what was being asked. Those five questions where there was agreement were: question 1 that asked teachers if they liked having the opportunity to give input into the type of writing professional development , question 3 that asked teachers if they have incorporated at least one new strategy or idea learned through professional development, question 6 that asked teachers if they liked working with their teams in PLCs to share ideas for writing, question 7 that asked teachers if they felt like they had been provided opportunities to

learn from colleagues, and question 8 that asked teachers if they felt like the professional development they had received was useful in helping to improve student achievement.

The open-ended response for the second question where teachers were asked to state which topic helped the most indicated that seven teachers felt that mentor text was the most helpful and six stated that conferencing was most helpful. Two teachers skipped the open-ended response for question two. One teacher disagreed on this question that any of the topics offered during the semester helped in teaching writing; however, this teacher also stated in the open-ended response that the use of mentor text was the most helpful topic.

The fourth question focused completely on the four teachers who are on the district writing team and their planning and delivery of several of the modules. Either the writing team members or the researcher delivered the professional development during the semester. The only PLC where the writing team members or the researcher did not deliver the professional development was with the module on writing instruction for struggling learners, which was delivered by an outside writing consultant. Out of the 15 teachers answering the fourth question, three did not agree that the vertical writing team did a good job with the creation and delivery of the professional development modules.

The fifth question had the most teachers disagree; however, that question asked teachers whether or not they felt they needed more support in implementing one or more of the new ideas into their classrooms. Nine of them did not feel they needed support. With the ninth question, one teacher disagreed on whether or not he or she contributed to

the learning environment. This teacher commented in the open-ended response to this question by stating “not sure.” The last question asked teachers whether or not they felt their team values learning in PLCs. Four teachers indicated that they disagreed with this statement. Because this survey was anonymous, there is no way to determine which teachers feel this way about their PLC groups.

Data Analysis for Research Questions 2-4

The second, third and fourth research questions work individually and together as data are analyzed to determine changes in different groups of teachers. The second, third and fourth questions were:

2. What differences occurred in writing instruction with four English teachers who are not on the writing team but who received professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
3. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the four teachers who are writing team members after conducting and receiving professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
4. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the three teachers who received instructional coaching in addition to writing professional development through Professional Learning Communities?

To analyze these three questions, they were first examined as three separate teacher groups. An unannounced observation was done on each teacher at the beginning of the semester before professional development began in PLCs and at the end of the semester

after all professional development had concluded. The focus areas from the observation instrument analyzed for this study were:

1. Learning process—learner engagement and critical thinking and problem solving through level of cognition (specifically, synthesis and evaluative levels);
2. Learner-centered instruction—motivational strategies used to teach writing;
3. Learner progress—monitoring and assessing students writing, appropriate assessment for all students (specifically, meeting the needs of struggling writers), and constructive feedback for students and their writing, and
5. High-yield strategies/best practices such as use of graphic organizers, brainstorming, modeling, setting objectives, and reinforcing writing efforts of students.

The first group of four teachers only received the writing professional development during the seven PLCs. They received no other professional development, support, or were served in any other capacity. A paired samples t-test was utilized to evaluate pre- and post-observation data on the identified related variables. Analysis revealed no significant differences on identified variables for the four teachers only receiving professional development in PLCs as seen in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6 Identified Variables for Four Teachers Only Receiving Professional Development in PLCs

Variables	p-value
EPre-EPost	0.058
SPre-SPost	*

Table 4.6 Continued

Variables	p-value
EvPre-EvPost	0.182
MsPre-MsPost	0.182
MaPre-MaPost	0.182
NsPre-NsPost	*
CfPre-CfPost	0.391
GoPre-GoPost	*
BPre-BPost	0.182
SpPre-SpPost	0.391
RpPre-RpPost	0.391

*Not able to be calculated due to a standard deviation of 0.

The second group of teachers was the four teachers who serve on the district writing team. In addition to receiving and assisting with the professional development during PLCs each week, they also received an additional layer of professional development by meeting with a district writing team who researched, analyzed data, and created writing professional development based on the identified needs of students. A paired samples t-test was utilized to evaluate pre- and post-observation data on the identified related variables. Analysis revealed no significant differences on identified variables for the writing team teachers as seen in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Identified Variables for Writing Team Teachers

Variables	p-value
EPre-EPost	0.391
SPre-SPost	*
EvPre-EvPost	*
MsPre-MsPost	0.391
MaPre-MaPost	0.391
NsPre-NsPost	0.391
CfPre-CfPost	0.182
GoPre-GoPost	0.391
BPre-BPost	*
SpPre-SpPost	1.0
RpPre-RpPost	0.391

*Not able to be calculated due to a standard deviation of 0.

The last group of teachers to be observed was three teachers who received the professional development during PLCs each week and also participated in instructional coaching with the researcher during the duration of the study. A paired samples t-test was utilized to evaluate pre- and post-observation data on the identified related variables. Analysis revealed no significant differences on identified variables for the three teachers who received professional development in PLCs and received instructional coaching as seen in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Identified Variables for Three Teachers Receiving Professional Development in PLCs and Instructional Coaching

Variables	p-value
EPre-EPost	*
SPre-SPost	*
EvPre-EvPost	*
MsPre-MsPost	0.184
MaPre-MaPost	*
NsPre-NsPost	*
CfPre-CfPost	*
GoPre-GoPost	0.184
BPre-BPost	0.184
SpPre-SpPost	*
RpPre-RpPost	0.423

*Not able to be calculated due to a standard deviation of 0.

In order to determine whether significant differences existed between groups from pre- to post-observations, the percent change of each variable was calculated. Statistical analysis was conducted using a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). A significant difference was found for MaPre/MaPost ($p=0.015$). A trend towards significance was found for BPre/BPost ($p=0.055$). No other significant differences were found in the variables analyzed. A Bonferroni post hoc analysis was utilized to

determine significant differences that existed between groups. A significant difference between groups two and three was found for MaPre/MaPost ($p=0.015$). A trend towards significance was found for BPre/BPost ($p=0.064$) between groups one and three. No other significant differences between specific groups were found.

Qualitative Analysis for Instructional Coaching

In addition to the quantitative data for the teachers who participated in instructional coaching, these teachers were also video recorded during each observation and were asked to complete a lesson reflection form (Appendix E) to reflect on their own teaching as they watched their video. They discussed their reflections with the researcher, who was also the instructional coach, at every coaching session that occurred between each observation. There were five coaching sessions and five coaching observations that took place over a 10-week period of time. In addition, each of these teachers was interviewed at the end of the semester. Prior to the interview with each teacher, they were given the interview questions (Appendix F) where they were asked to respond to the questions in writing and to bring them to the interview. The face-to-face interviews with these three teachers were recorded, and the recordings were transcribed. The transcriptions of the recordings were compared to the transcriptions of the written responses from the teachers regarding the questions asked in order to determine comparable statements between what they wrote and what they stated in the interview. The exact same questions were asked in the interview that were asked on paper. Each teacher used the paper as a reference during the interview but expanded on their written statements as they spoke. Using these transcriptions and comparisons, along with the

reflection notes the teachers completed after each observation, the researcher created a codebook in order to take notes and comments from each transcription and set of reflection notes to develop categories as evidence arose from what each teacher said that began to become similar (Creswell, 2013). Following this step of coding, or developing categories, the researcher established themes that arose collectively from the transcriptions.

The three teachers who received instructional coaching were asked three questions pertaining to their overall experience at the end of the study. The three questions were:

1. What do you feel you learned from this experience?
2. What would you have liked to have seen happen during this experience that did not happen?
3. Do you feel the coaching experience has helped you reach the goals you set for yourself at the beginning of the semester?

Within their reflection notes after each observation, the teachers were also asked five questions:

1. What were my goals?
2. What happened in the lesson?
3. What should I change?
4. What should stay the same?
5. What's my plan for next time?

Within the transcriptions of all three interviews and the reviewing of teachers' reflection notes, two major themes arose from their perceptions of being coached. The major themes of self-awareness and collaboration throughout the coaching process became immediately evident with each teacher. Table 4.9 provides a visual of the awareness theme and examples that emerged from the interviews and notes.

Table 4.9 Awareness Theme from Interviews

Awareness	Examples from Interviews/ Reflection Notes
	<p>“I’ve still got a ways to go on all of those things, but I think I got better.”</p>
	<p>“If I know you or another administrator are coming in to watch me do something and I want to do it well, I am going to practice it before then too.”</p>
	<p>“I was very conscious of everything going on.”</p>
	<p>“Which normal teaching is that, being so aware of...”</p>
	<p>“I was thinking forward, ahead of time.”</p>
	<p>“I listed my three I felt I grew the most in, and that was pushing low readers, challenging my GT kids, and the higher level thinking skills, and then conferencing.”</p>
	<p>“I learned some of my own behaviors, I guess, that I have in front of the room and in front of the kids that I don’t pay attention to.”</p>

Table 4.9 Continued

Awareness	Examples from Interviews/ Reflection Notes
	I learned more about “engagement of the kids more from watching the videos.” From the videos, “it’s the little things you don’t notice you’re doing.”
	“The videos were the most integral part because I could watch them, I could make observations, I could reflect, and then I could think about it until the next time or even the next day.”
	“I feel like from where we started and the battles we had, we came a long way in those five weeks.”
	“I think it’s just really beneficial because there are so many things about yourself you don’t even realize unless you see it.”
	I also noticed that my two classes who struggle the most are my 6 th and 7 th periods, which are my last two classes.”
	“I believe the lesson was way too long and needs to be shortened.”
	“I felt like I left more time for students to ask questions at the end; though, I think I could have left even more time.”
	“I need to call on reluctant students more often and make them involved.”

The next theme to emerge from the interviews with teachers was the theme of collaboration. Table 4.10 provides a visual of the collaboration theme and examples that emerged from the interviews.

Table 4.10 Collaboration Theme from Interviews

Collaboration	Examples from Interviews
	“if you say, ‘you really need to work on your questioning strategies—let me show you what that looks like next time.’”
	“If I get an intern...we would go and observe a class during the conference for like 20-30 minutes. We would come back and compare notes to discuss ...”
	“it won’t be like, I teach and you stay off to the side. We’ll both be in front of that room together.”
	“It holds you accountable.”
	“I like having goals set at the beginning and working together towards those goals.”
	“if we had someone who was always here who was room to room constantly...you could just say, ‘hey, I am struggling with this...’”
	”I almost don’t want people to tell me when they are going to show up. Give me maybe a window of like sometime this month I’ll be there...I want you to see the majority rather than me putting on a show.”

Data Analysis for Research Question 5

In order to answer the fifth research question regarding whether or not student achievement increased in the 9th grade teachers’ classrooms, a percent change on the STAAR Writing assessment was calculated from students’ pre- post-assessment scores. An independent samples *t* test was conducted to determine whether significant

differences existed between teachers who received instructional coaching along with weekly professional development and teachers who only received weekly professional development. Evaluation of statistical data revealed no significant differences between the groups in any of the assessed STAAR variables as seen in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11 Assessed STAAR Variables

Variables	p-value
Revision of Text (13C)	0.361
Editing of Text (13D)	0.570
Revision of Expository Text (15A)	0.988
Editing of Sentence Structure (17C)	0.326
Editing of Punctuation (18B)	0.107
Editing of Spelling (19A)	0.440

CHAPTER V
RESEARCH OVERVIEW, SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS,
RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

Research Overview

WISD student writing assessment results with the transition of the state assessments from TAKS to STAAR noticeably declined. Based on increased levels of difficulty and rigor on the new STAAR assessment and what it demanded of teachers with respect to deeper levels of instruction, the school district understood that changes were needed in order to see student writing proficiency increase. The most critical component determined by the district was with professional development for English teachers in order to see changes in classroom instruction. The professional development was to occur within PLCs that were embedded into the teachers' workday. PLCs were still fairly new to WISD's high school campus; this is their second year to have them in place. This mixed-methods study investigated the perceptions and implementation of professional development provided to all 18 English teachers at the high school campus in the area of writing.

The focus of this study was: How do teachers respond to wanting to improve their instructional practices for teaching writing when ongoing, sustained professional development is provided? Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in order to answer the following questions:

1. What is the perception of WISD high school English teachers regarding the quality of the writing professional development they received through PLCs?

2. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the four teachers who are writing team members after conducting and receiving professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
3. What differences occurred in writing instruction with four other English teachers who are not on the writing team but who received professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
4. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the three teachers who received instructional coaching in addition to writing professional development through Professional Learning Communities?
5. Did student achievement increase in writing in the 9th grade teachers' classrooms on the STAAR Writing assessment from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment?

Qualitative data collected consisted of a teacher survey where the perceptions of teachers regarding the writing professional development were given, observation notes taken during each PLC where professional development was given, and transcriptions from interviews and reflection notes with each teacher who received instructional coaching that were then coded to determine overarching themes from these teachers' feelings regarding the coaching they received. Quantitative data collected consisted of a pre- and post-observation of each teacher involved in the comparison groups: four teachers who participated on the district writing team who also received weekly professional development, three who received instructional coaching during a 10-week period combined with weekly professional development, and three teachers who only

received weekly professional development. In addition, one final piece of quantitative data collected was students' pre-posttest STAAR writing scores of the five 9th grade team members. The percentage gain of students' scores of the three teachers on the team who only received weekly professional development was compared with two on the team who received instructional coaching in addition to weekly professional development.

In all, this study compared the implementation of newly acquired skills and strategies of teachers who received weekly professional development in PLCs with teachers who received an additional layer of support by either being a part of the district writing team or by receiving instructional coaching in addition to weekly professional development. In addition, this study also included the teachers' perceptions of the professional development they received in order to determine their feelings and buy-in regarding instructional practices for implementation in their classrooms. Finally, this study compared the STAAR assessment results in writing of the 9th grade teachers where three teachers received only the weekly professional development and two of the teachers received instructional coaching in addition to the weekly professional development.

Chapter V provides an overview of the research, a summary of the findings, analysis of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion to the study.

Summary of Findings

Table 5.1 provides a summary of the research questions that guided this study and the findings for each question.

Table 5.1 Summary of Findings

Question	Findings
1. What is the perception of all high school English teachers regarding the quality of the writing professional development they received through Professional Learning Communities?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers had an overall desire to collaborate with one another during PLCs. 2. The majority of teachers had a positive attitude of learning during PLCs. 3. Teachers had a desire to try at least one new strategy learned from the professional development given to them.
2. What differences occurred in writing instruction with four English teachers who are not on the writing team but who received professional development through Professional Learning Communities?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No statistical significant changes occurred with writing instruction with the teachers who only received professional development during PLCs.
3. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the four teachers who are writing team members after conducting and receiving professional development through Professional Learning Communities?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No statistical significant changes occurred with writing instruction with the teachers who served on the writing team and who received professional development during PLCs. 2. Two out of the four teachers improved in utilizing brainstorming as a strategy for writing instruction.

Table 5.1 Continued

Question	Findings
4. What differences occurred in writing instruction with the three teachers who received instructional coaching in addition to writing professional development through Professional Learning Communities?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. A significant difference between groups two (PLC only group) and three (PLCs and instructional coaching) in monitoring and assessing student achievement ($p=0.015$).2. Teachers became more aware of teaching practices that were either positive or negative.3. Teachers enjoyed the opportunity to collaborate with someone else on their teaching and desire more of that.
5. Did student achievement increase in writing in the 9 th grade teachers' classrooms on the STAAR Writing assessment from the pre-assessment to the post-assessment?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. No statistical significant differences occurred between the two groups of teachers.
Overarching question: How do teachers respond to wanting to improve their instructional practices for teaching writing when ongoing, sustained professional development is provided?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Teachers desire to collaborate with one another.2. Teachers are willing to try new strategies once taught to them.3. The structure and continuity of PLCs needs to continue in order for more teachers to value the need for PLCs.4. Implementation of professional development needs to improve with all English teachers, regardless of intervention.

A significant difference was seen in the pre- and post-observations conducted in the three groups of teachers with all teachers in group three practicing monitoring and assessing student achievement. Only one variable was significantly different. However, teachers do seem to appreciate the opportunity to learn and collaborate with one another.

Qualitative Interpretations for English Teachers

Qualitative data from this study revealed the most information regarding themes that were present amongst teachers in terms of perceptions and a desire to change their teaching practices in order to become stronger writing teachers. The three themes that emerged from the observations were collaboration, an attitude of learning, and a willingness to try something new.

Within the theme of collaboration, there were isolated incidents with two specific sets of teachers that involved a lack of participation and collaboration. One teacher repeatedly brought work to grade or prepare during the PLCs and disengaged from the rest of the group. Another pair of teachers on a different grade level exhibited a lack of collaboration and collegiality on several occasions through body language that expressed a disinterest in collaborating. One example of this negative body language was by sitting away from the rest of the group and working independently. However, overall, the observation evidence throughout the seven weeks and 28 PLCs indicated a desire by the majority of the teachers to not only have input into the professional development they receive, but also to collaborate with one another in order to learn and grow as teachers. Archibald, Coggshall, Croft, and Goe (2011) state that two of the most important components of high-quality professional development are having teacher input and time to collaborate through a professional learning activity (p. 14). For the English teachers in WISD, they were provided the opportunity to do both of these.

Within the theme of having an attitude of learning, negative behavior all came from one specific PLC. There were two teachers who were responsible for that negative

behavior, both verbally and behaviorally. These two teachers were the same teachers exhibiting the negative behavior in the collaboration theme. The other remaining three teachers in that PLC were either positive, or they remained quiet as the negative behavior was displayed. Overall, positive attitudes were more dominant than negative attitudes, both in verbal and in body language, with teachers during the PLCs that focused on writing professional development.

Within the final theme of teachers having a willingness to try something new in their classrooms, the only negative comment came from the same teacher who offered negative comments in the other two thematic areas by saying, “Didn’t we already talk about this,” as she rolled her eyes when the discussion centered around reviewing the previous week’s professional development topic with respect to how it would work in a classroom.

Out of the 18 teachers involved in professional development, negative actions and words only came from three teachers who did not find value in receiving or giving information that would be important in becoming a stronger teacher of writing for students. None of these three teachers participated in professional development beyond the weekly PLC that all 18 teachers received, unlike seven of the other teachers who were either on the district writing team or received instructional coaching in addition to the weekly PLC. The researcher’s conclusions regarding these behaviors are that these three teachers did not see value in receiving professional development in an area where they feel they teach well. In essence, they felt time spent learning about how to teach writing was not beneficial to them. Overall, the observations by the researcher note

collaboration between teachers, positive attitudes as they received professional development and discussed its impact on their teaching, and a willingness to take at least one new thing learned during the semester and incorporate it into their classrooms.

When comparing the observation notes to the teacher survey results, both pieces of data are consistent with one another. Based on the observation notes taken during PLCs, there is evidence of negative behavior and attitudes with a few teachers that would link to the 26% of teachers in the survey who do not feel that some of their team members value learning that is taking place. Fifteen out of the 18 teachers responded during PLCs with positive behaviors and comments. The survey indicates that out of the 15 who took it, at least 11 of them perceived the offered professional development as a positive experience.

The themes that presented themselves in the observations (collaboration, attitude of learning, and willingness to try something new) make known that teachers do want to be learners. Overall, teachers are not satisfied with the state of student writing currently. Although change is difficult at times, most teachers displayed a desire to improve in the PLC setting with colleagues and new ideas present. In addition, out of the 15 teachers who took the final survey regarding their perceptions of the professional development offered during this semester, 26% of the teachers indicated that they did not feel their colleagues value the learning that takes place during PLCs. This evidence suggests that there is still work that needs to be done to create a more positive culture in PLCs that values learning by all teachers. In addition, there are critical questions that Dufour,

Dufour, and Eaker (2008) cite that should be the focus a PLC on student learning were not always present. Those critical questions are:

1. What is it we expect students to learn?
2. How will we know when they have learned it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn?
4. How will we respond when some students already know it?

Along with professional development during PLCs, having student data in order to determine if instructional strategies used are effective is critical. The high school English teachers at WISD continued to learn at the end of their second year with PLCs how important this knowledge is in order to sort out what is effective and what is not.

Qualitative Interpretations for Instructional Coaching

The qualitative data from the teachers receiving instructional coaching also brought to light a desire to not only collaborate, but it revealed a level of awareness of teaching practices that the teachers had not realized previously. The instructional coaching resulted in improved teacher focus and planning for future lessons. These teachers valued their experience with instructional coaching and requested that it continue for teachers in order to improve instructional practices.

All three teachers did become aware of teaching practices they didn't previously detect once they watched videos of their teaching. Through this practice and then discussing each lesson with the researcher, they became cognizant of what they were doing, both good and bad, as they taught a lesson. In addition, all three teachers noted they enjoyed working with someone who came in their rooms for more than just a few

minutes for an observation. Two of them mentioned that they would like to experience more co-teaching next year with an instructional coach so that they can watch someone else teach and model after that person. Overall, the idea of collaborating with other colleagues or an instructional coach is something they not only enjoy, but they desire more of that in order to become better teachers.

Practical Implications for Educational Leaders

This study provides several practical implications for educational leaders who are desiring to see effective integration of PLCs and instructional coaching resulting in improved classroom instruction. For positive changes to occur in classrooms, teachers must be willing and proactive in their own professional learning so that students receive the best education possible; in order for that to happen, they must work together to identify and critically think to solve classroom concerns and “ethical dilemmas” (Sellars, 2012, p. 461). Implementing PLCs for schools provides the opportunity for ongoing, sustained professional development. However, there must be a focused plan for teachers that not only offers them what they need in regards to professional development, but also a way to measure how that professional development transcends into the classroom. Also, there must be measures in place to determine if the classroom instruction impacts student learning.

The district and campus leaders in WISD sought to implement a plan that would begin to support teachers who needed ongoing, sustained professional development. The principal at WISD’s high school implemented PLCs two years ago because he knew a major key in changing instructional practices was incorporating teacher learning within

the school day. This change has begun the process of allowing for “opportunities to cultivate the growth of PLCs by providing the time for and encouraging the use of collegial conversations” (Spanneaut, 2010, p. 103).

Instructional coaching, that over time nurtures a strong relationship to occur between the instructional coach and the teacher being coached, is an effective way to see instructional practices improved. Trust is critical between the instructional coach and the teacher. Without it, improvements in the classroom are not likely to occur (Anderson et al., 2014, p. 15). Mutual respect is also necessary in order for the coaching relationship to work. As was in the situation with the teachers who were coached in this study, they were respectfully allowed to determine their goals while facilitating opportunities for improvement, awareness and reflection. When coaches allow for this type of relationship, they show “respect to individual teachers by listening to their concerns and having them determine the focus and goals of the coaching work” (Anderson et al., 2014, p. 10).

Situations are different depending on the needs of the campus and the preferences of the principal at the campus. Some teachers desire a collegial relationship with an expert who can help them to improve their instruction. Other times, teachers do not always welcome the idea of receiving instructional coaching. The researcher served as the instructional coach for this study for three teachers who welcomed the idea of working with a coach who would offer them advice and provide opportunities for reflective practice and dialogue in order to address areas in their own teaching they wanted to improve. Although the quantitative data did not show significant changes in

their classrooms, all three teachers felt that the experience was positive and made them more aware of what they were and were not doing as teachers. Additionally, the relationship between the instructional coach and these teachers has been established and rooted in trust. Therefore, the overall combination of the relationship between the teachers and the coach, and the awareness of the ongoing need for improving practices are the gains that occurred throughout this study with the instructional coaching focus.

In order for instructional coaching to be effective, campus leaders must determine when it is needed, and they must help to create the environment that fosters a trusting relationship between the coach and the teacher. Likewise, instructional coaches must not only develop a trusting relationship over time, but they must be experts in the curriculum and instruction necessary to help a teacher improve.

Recommendations

Recommendations for WISD's High School Campus

This study focused on how teachers valued the writing professional development they received during PLCs, as well as how they implemented the strategies learned during those PLCs. Quantitative data did not show many significant differences from the beginning to the end of the study. This could be attributed to the fact that more time is needed to continue teaching and learning instructional strategies that lead to more student success. Chung Wei et al. (2010) state that teachers need anywhere between 49 and 100 hours of ongoing professional development in a given focus area in order to see differences in student performance (p. 2). The qualitative data did provide information on teachers' perceptions regarding the need for change, as well as the awareness that

teachers had after participating in professional development that helped them to see where change was needed. The goal was to utilize PLCs as a viable opportunity to provide ongoing, sustained professional development that could improve instruction to better serve and educate students. Through this study, understanding the utilization of PLCs helped the researcher to determine that ELA teachers at the high school campus can continue to improve the use of time during PLCs, the sustained focus during PLCs, and the overall culture of learning during PLCs. The teachers have a built-in PLC every single day. Professional development is the focus for one PLC each week. Each other day has a different focus. One primary recommendation for WISD's high school English teachers is to ensure that each day's focus is connected to every other PLC focus for the week. For example, one day's focus is data. Another's day's focus is technology. The two remaining days are focused on lesson planning. Everything that is discussed in professional development can impact what is discussed with data that is collected to determine if instruction is resulting in student achievement. Those focus areas are directly connected to how lesson planning should occur. Currently, each day's focus is disconnected from the other focus areas. A discussion on the day focusing on data may be about one skill deficit teachers noticed in test results, but then when they focus on lesson planning, strategies on how to address that skill aren't mentioned. The professional development day may be about a completely different focus area rather than on the skill deficits noticed in the data. By having teachers work towards making each focus area connect to the next, they can take the data they collect, learn technology skills that can be incorporated in class to focus on areas of weakness, focus lesson plans to

increase student achievement in those areas of weakness, and also research and share learned ideas or strategies during the professional development day that relate to areas of weakness identified through the data collected at the beginning of the week. This streamlining of the PLC focus areas will create a chain of learning that will be built on the cumulative knowledge acquired in previous PLCs, and time will be better spent on student success.

PLCs are still fairly new to this high school campus, and developing a focused agenda for each PLC is still occurring. From the beginning to the end of this study, teachers did begin to discuss and share more regarding what they do regarding effective instruction and what they do not effectively do regarding instruction. Ultimately, the goal is to see continuous improvement in teachers' classroom instruction, but teachers do appear to be changing their views from "individual professionalism" to "collective professionalism" (Tam, 2014, p. 25).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined 18 English teachers during a 15-week period of time during PLCs and instructional coaching. The results of this study suggest that PLCs can be powerful for teachers in order to collaborate and to learn new strategies to improve their own instruction. The results also suggest that instructional coaching, when the relationship between the coach and the teacher is strong, trustworthy and respectful, can aid in teachers becoming more aware of their own teaching practices and create a desire for more collaboration in order to become stronger teachers. However, there are three recommendations for future research as to how this study could have been enhanced or

improved. The three recommendations that could have improved this study are: exploring how other PLC focus areas connect to the professional development focus, exploring more student assessment data in relation to PLC practices, and extending the amount of time for the study.

In this study, only one PLC focus area was studied: professional development. The teachers also have focus areas of data, technology and lesson planning in their PLCs the other days of each week. By including the focus areas of data, technology and lesson planning as they connect to professional development, conclusions could be made as to how they affect student achievement in writing.

Additionally, including more student assessment data in a study could provide evidence as to whether or not PLCs are making a difference in students' mastery of writing proficiency. This study only included the STAAR writing data of the ninth grade and only included certain skills that were assessed. No essay scoring data was included due to the extenuating details included in the scoring process. However, other research could examine individual student essays to determine if instructional strategies used to teach specific writing skills have an impact on essay writing.

Extending the amount of time of this study could also offer more information. This study took place over a 15-week time period. During that time period, there were seven PLCs per grade level devoted to different writing professional development focus areas. Along with the professional development provided during PLCs, there were also 10 weeks of instructional coaching that took place with three teachers. Because PLCs are still new to this campus, the attitude and desire of teachers to use that time to

improve professionally still lacks in a few of the teachers. Along with trying to create norms and a regular occurrence of professional development each week for the teachers, some teachers still did not want to buy in to the reasons for why this ongoing professional development was important. With a longer period of time and set expectations for learning, research could be conducted to better determine the effects of having PLCs devoted to professional development and how that impacts student performance.

By collecting data on how all PLC focus areas work together, extending the amount of student data, and extending the length of time for the study, the connection could possibly better be made between teacher learning and student performance improvement.

Conclusion

This mixed-methods study sought to examine the perceptions of teachers regarding professional development they received to become better writing teachers, and it sought to examine the impact of that professional development as seen in classrooms.

The high school campus in WISD implemented PLCs two years ago. This campus was halfway through their second year of implementation when this study began. Their administrators had given teachers norms as to how PLCs should occur, and they had been given a focus area for each day of the week. Prior to this study, the teachers were on their own to ensure that the focus areas were covered each day of the week. The researcher found prior to the study that little professional development was occurring with these teachers beyond the minimum of two days required of them

annually by the school district that was outside of their teaching contract. The desire of the district administration was that writing proficiency for high school students improve, and the campus administration wanted PLCs to be more effective in order to help reach the goal of improving writing proficiency. Efforts were made by the researcher to create continuity with weekly professional development and to ask teachers what they desired to learn during the PLCs. Through utilizing the time through PLCs and the feedback from teachers on areas they wished to receive professional development, PLCs were focused on those areas. Four of the teachers were also a part of a district writing team that met monthly with the researcher to investigate and problem solve the writing weaknesses at the secondary level. Instructional coaching was also an added layer of support for three teachers who volunteered to work with the researcher as an instructional coach in addition to participating in the weekly professional development that all other teachers received.

This study revealed that teachers were not used to having a detailed focus for professional development during their PLC, nor were they used to having an administrator present each week for a PLC in order to ensure that ongoing professional development occurred. The qualitative results revealed that teachers perceived the professional development offered to be a positive experience and agreed that they not only liked having input on the topics covered, but they tried to implement one or more of the learned strategies. Most teachers also felt that the professional development they received this semester was valuable to them. The themes that presented themselves from the observed PLCs (collaboration, attitude of learning, and willingness to try something

new) displayed more positive outcomes than negative with all 18 English teachers as they worked to establish an ongoing professional development approach. However, the survey teachers took also revealed that several teachers do not feel that all colleagues value the learning that takes place during PLCs. That data parallels some of the negative verbal and body language observed by the researcher during PLCs.

The instructional coaching layer included observations, reflection forms, and interviews with the researcher. Although the pre- and post-observations did not reveal significant changes with these three teachers, the qualitative data did reveal that these teachers became much more aware of themselves as teachers and what they do and do not feel should be occurring in their classrooms. They had the opportunity to view themselves teach through recorded videos, and they were able to collaborate and dialogue with the researcher after every recorded lesson. This gave them the opportunity to reflect and analyze their own teaching practices. These occurrences received very positive feedback from all three teachers who participated, and they not only want to continue with instructional coaching, but they also wish more teachers would be willing to participate.

The quantitative data determined that some significant changes occurred with teachers from the pre- and post-observations, which were seeking implementation of strategies and discussions learned during the PLCs. These observations were two data points that occurred one time at the beginning and one time at the end of the study. Although observations were done with hopes of seeing implementation of one or more of the learned strategies through professional development, they did not reveal that

implementation of these learned strategies were occurring in all of the classrooms at the time of the post observation. However, even though the quantitative data did not indicate that implementation of learned strategies had occurred, the qualitative data did indicate that there is a progression of change in thinking and collaborating in professional development with the high school English teachers at WISD.

The practical implications of this study are that this campus must continue to create structure and accountability with PLCs so that teachers see the daily time given as an opportunity to be learners who have time to collaborate with one another. The idea of connecting all PLCs each week will enforce and strengthen this learning and reflection time for teachers. Campus leaders can continue to expect and to encourage teachers to determine their needs and to seek ways to meet those needs during PLCs. Campus leaders can also consider more ways of incorporating instructional coaching where needed or desired by teachers. When teachers do finally see themselves teaching and can work with someone they trust and respect, their desire to become stronger teachers will naturally happen.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY OF TEACHER PRIORITIES

Area of Writing	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
Teaching grammar	3	2	1
Teaching writing strategies	3	2	1
Teaching parts of the writing process (brainstorming, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing) Specify which part if high priority: _____	3	2	1
Understanding the expectations for students in the writing standards	3	2	1
Using mentor text to model good writing	3	2	1
Conferencing with students	3	2	1
Using rubrics for instruction and assessment	3	2	1
Effective instruction for struggling writers	3	2	1
Using the results of assessments to plan effective instruction	3	2	1
Effective classroom management during writing instruction	3	2	1
Teaching specific writing genres	3	2	1
Integrating reading and writing into lessons	3	2	1
Other:	3	2	1
Other:	3	2	1

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Length of Activity: 45 minutes	
Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

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APPENDIX C

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT—ENGLISH TEACHER SURVEY

SPRING 2015

Throughout this spring semester, you have participated in writing professional development during your Friday PLCs. Please indicate your level of agreement to the following statements.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

1. I liked having the opportunity to give input about what writing topics were addressed in our professional development PLCs this spring.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

2. I feel that at least one of the topics covered during this semester helped me in teaching writing.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

- The most helpful topic for me was _____

3. I have incorporated one or more of the strategies or ideas shared in our PLCs this spring.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

- The idea(s) and/or strategy(ies) I have incorporated are _____

4. Our vertical writing team did a good job of creating modules to address chosen writing topics.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

- The most effective module(s) for me was/were _____

5. I feel like I need more support in implementing one or more of the writing ideas into my classroom.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

- I needed more support in implementing this/these idea(s). _____

6. I like working with my team in PLCs to share information on implementing writing ideas and strategies.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

7. I feel like I have been provided opportunities to learn from my colleagues.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

- One specific piece of new learning I acquired this semester was_____

8. I feel like professional development this semester in the area of writing has been useful to ME in my efforts to improve student achievement.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

9. I feel like I have contributed to the learning environment within my PLC this semester.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

One way I have contributed to my PLC is_____

10. I feel like my team values the learning that takes place in PLCs.

Strongly Agree **Agree** **Disagree** **Strongly Disagree**

APPENDIX D

360° WALKTHROUGH OBSERVATION FORM

360° Walkthrough Observation

For the 21st Century School Administrator

Teacher:
Class Information:
Start Time:
Campus:

Observed By:
Observation Date:
End Time:

D1. LEARNING PROCESS	D2. LEARNER-CENTERED INSTRUCTION	D3. LEARNER PROGRESS	D4. LEARNER MANAGEMENT
1a. Engaged in Learning Learner Engagement: Engagement Strategic Compliance Ritual Compliance Retreatism Rebellion 1b. Successful in Learning 1c. Critical Thinking & Problem Solving Learner Level of Cognition: Knowledge Comprehension Application Analysis Synthesis Evaluation 1d. Self-Directed 1e. Connecting Learning Quality/Quantity	2a. Goals & Objectives 2b. Learner-Centered Instruction 2c. Motivational Strategies 2d. Alignment 2e. Pacing & Sequence 2f. Value & Importance 2g. Appropriate Questioning & Inquiry 2h. Use of Technology & Tools Quality/Quantity	3a. Monitored & Assessed 3b. Assessment & Instruction are Aligned 3c. Appropriate Assessment Addresses the Needs of Struggling Students 3d. Learning Reinforced 3e. Constructive Feedback 3f. Re-Learning & Re-Evaluation Quality/Quantity	4a. Discipline Procedures 4b. Self-Discipline & Self-Directed Learning 4c. Equitable Teacher-Student Interactions 4d. Expectations for Behavior 4e. Redirects Disruptive Behavior 4f. Reinforces Desired Behavior 4g. Equitable & Varied Instructional Materials 4h. Manages Time & Materials Quality/Quantity

HIGH-YIELD STRATEGIES/BEST PRACTICES

KWL	Identifying Similarities/Differences	Brainstorming	Word Walls
Cooperative Learning	Homework/Practice	Wait Time	Hands-on Practice Manipulatives
Small Group Instruction	Communicating Learning	Story Mapping	Generating/Testing Hypothesis
Step Vocabulary Process	Graphic Organizers	Projects, Demonstrations, Modeling, Labs	Other
Summarizing/Note Taking	Concept Maps	Setting Objectives/Providing Feedback	Other
Nonlinguistic Representations	Solving Problems (Multiple Ways)	Reinforcing Effort/Providing Recognition	Other

_____ Date: _____

_____ Date: _____

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APPENDIX E
LESSON REFLECTION FORM

Class:

Date:

What were my goals?	What happened in the lesson?
What should I change?	What should stay the same?
What's the plan?	

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