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AN EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DEMONSTRATION
CLASSROOM PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Nicole M. Robinson

Educational Leadership Doctoral Program

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of
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Document Origination Statement Digital Commons @ NLU

This document was created as *one* part of the three-part dissertation requirement of the National Louis University (NLU) Educational Leadership (EDL) Doctoral Program. The National Louis Educational Leadership EdD is a professional practice degree program (Shulman et al., 2006).

For the dissertation requirement, doctoral candidates are required to plan, research, and implement three major projects, one each year, within their school or district with a focus on professional practice. The three projects are:

- Program Evaluation
- Change Leadership Plan
- Policy Advocacy Document

For the **Program Evaluation** candidates are required to identify and evaluate a program or practice within their school or district. The “program” can be a current initiative; a grant project; a common practice; or a movement. Focused on utilization, the evaluation can be formative, summative, or developmental (Patton, 2008). The candidate must demonstrate how the evaluation directly relates to student learning.

In the **Change Leadership Plan** candidates develop a plan that considers organizational possibilities for renewal. The plan for organizational change may be at the building or district level. It must be related to an area in need of improvement, and have a clear target in mind. The candidate must be able to identify noticeable and feasible differences that should exist as a result of the change plan (Wagner et al., 2006).

In the **Policy Advocacy Document** candidates develop and advocate for a policy at the local, state or national level using reflective practice and research as a means for supporting and promoting reforms in education. Policy advocacy dissertations use critical theory to address moral and ethical issues of policy formation and administrative decision making (i.e., what ought to be). The purpose is to develop reflective, humane and social critics, moral leaders, and competent professionals, guided by a critical practical rational model (Browder, 1995).

Works Cited

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of the Demonstration Classroom professional development opportunity in meeting its stated goals:

- To increase teacher efficacy
- To share best practice instruction
- To increase collaborative culture
- To positively impact student performance
- To ensure that professional learning is applied and consistently implemented
- To give support to teachers in implementing new initiatives in the district.

The Demonstration Classroom experience allows teachers to observe others in practice and includes an application piece for observers to demonstrate their understanding of the new learning. To capture the perceptions of teachers involved in the Demonstration Classroom process, a survey was administered to 51 teachers who had participated in Demonstration Classrooms during the 2012 – 2013 and 2013 – 2014 school years. Two focus group interviews, involving nine teachers, were conducted to gain additional insights from the survey results. Additionally, a Demonstration Classroom host teacher contributed her thoughts in a reflective journal on the process of developing and delivering a demonstration lesson. Results of the study indicate that the Demonstration Classroom experience was overwhelmingly satisfying to all who have participated, and the program was determined to be effective in meeting its goals.

PREFACE

When I entered the National Louis Educational Leadership Doctoral Program a year ago, I knew I would be embarking upon an important transformation in my personal and professional life, but I did not know how much I would change in just one year's time. Much of that change has come from completing this program evaluation. The process of setting out to determine the effectiveness of a professional development program in Brighton School District 32 (pseudonyms are used throughout this paper) where I serve as an elementary school principal has been exceedingly gratifying and has pushed my thinking more than I could have imagined.

The greatest effect this program evaluation has had on me is a deeper understanding of and commitment to my collaborative leadership style. As a collaborative leader, I have always believed it is essential to bring stakeholders to the table to discuss issues before making large-scale changes or implementing new programs or initiatives. After spending a significant amount of time with teachers involved in this professional development experience as I sought to determine the effectiveness of the Demonstration Classroom program, I was able to learn much more about the impacts of the program and suggestions for making the experience even better. Finding the time to collaborate with stakeholders to discuss programs and initiatives is time-consuming and sometimes viewed as unimportant, but this project has reaffirmed for me just how necessary this collaboration is for success and sustainability.

In addition, the program evaluation taught me of the importance of clear communication. Never have I been more intentional in my word choice than when constructing an electronic survey or preparing for focus group interviews for this study.

This careful consideration of words helped me to refine my communication skills and hone the ability to ask the right questions at the right time. Both of these skills are necessary for any educational leader to possess.

Finally, this project helped to prepare me for a future as a district-level administrator in many ways. By focusing on a district-wide program, I was able to take a step back from my school building and consider the ramifications of this program across the entire district. Additionally, the program evaluation taught me to place greater emphasis on data to review programs and initiatives that have been implemented in the district. I have always made data-driven decisions when it comes to individual students and teachers, but had not participated in the evaluation of a program. This is an essential skill of any district-level administrator who seeks to keep a finger on the pulse of any programs or initiatives in place in the system.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
PREFACE.....	iv
LIST OF TABLES.....	ix
SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Purpose.....	1
Rationale.....	2
Goals of the Program Evaluation.....	4
Research Questions.....	5
SECTION 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	7
Introduction.....	7
Demonstration Classrooms.....	7
Effective Teacher Professional Development.....	8
Teacher Collaboration.....	12
Peer Observation.....	16
Lesson Study.....	19
Lesson Study Process.....	19
Challenges Associated with Lesson Study.....	21
Benefits of Lesson Study.....	22
Summary.....	23
SECTION 3: METHODOLOGY.....	24
Research Design Overview.....	24

Participants.....	25
Data Gathering Techniques.....	25
Survey.....	25
Focus Groups.....	27
Reflective Journaling.....	27
Data Analysis Techniques.....	28
Quantitative Analysis.....	28
Qualitative Analysis.....	29
Limitations of the Study.....	30
SECTION 4: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS.....	32
Introduction.....	32
Survey Results.....	32
Demographics.....	33
Structured Statements.....	35
Unstructured Questions.....	44
Summary of Survey Data.....	50
Focus Group Interviews.....	51
Theme One: The Demonstration Classroom Has a Positive Impact on Teachers’ Instructional Practice.....	52
Theme Two: Teachers Perceive the Demonstration Classroom to Have a Positive Impact on Student Performance.....	54
Theme Three: The Demonstration Classroom Has Little Impact on Teacher Collaboration.....	55

Theme Four: Limitations of the Current Structure.....	57
Sign-Up Process.....	57
Lesson Authenticity.....	59
Required Application of Learning Activity.....	60
Teacher’s Reflective Journal.....	62
Theme One: The Demonstration Classroom Has a Positive Impact on Instructional Practice.....	63
Theme Two: The Demonstration Classroom Has a Positive Effect on Teacher Leadership and Efficacy.....	64
Theme Three: The Demonstration Classroom Has a Positive Impact on Students....	65
Theme Four: Drawbacks of the Experience.....	66
Summary of Qualitative Data.....	67
SECTION 5: JUDGMENT AND RECOMMENDATION.....	69
Introduction.....	69
Judgment.....	69
Teacher Leadership and Efficacy.....	70
Impact on Instructional Practice.....	71
Impact on Teacher Collaboration.....	71
Support and Clarity for District 32 High-Priority Initiatives.....	72
Recommendations.....	72
REFERENCE LIST.....	76
Appendix A: Demonstration Classroom Teacher Survey.....	79
Appendix B: Focus Group Interview Questions.....	83

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 - Statement 1.....	35
Table 2 - Statement 2.....	37
Table 3 - Statement 3.....	38
Table 4 - Statement 4.....	39
Table 5 - Statement 5.....	40
Table 6 - Statement 6.....	41
Table 7 - Statement 7.....	42
Table 8 - Statement 8.....	43

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Purpose

Brighton School District 32 (BSD32) has implemented the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience within the district for two school years. This form of professional learning is different from the traditional one-day workshop or conference professional development experience for several reasons: the learning is connected to important instructional initiatives in our district; teachers from within our district are the experts leading the sessions; and teachers who attend the Demonstration Classroom sessions are required to apply their new learning in their classrooms and are given support to do so.

The Director of Instructional Services in the district serves as the Demonstration Classroom Facilitator. Her role is to seek out teachers who have excellent instructional practices and are willing to share their practices with others. The Facilitator then works with the Demonstration Classroom host teacher to plan a lesson for teachers to observe. Observers must determine specific learning goals for the day and then show application of their learning after the Demonstration Classroom experience is over. The process for participation in the Demonstration Classroom is consistent:

1. **Orientation:** An opportunity to connect with the Facilitator and share specific learning goals for the day.
2. **Observation:** A focused observation and authentic professional learning in the actual classroom, guided by the Facilitator.

3. **Debrief:** An opportunity to reflect upon the classroom experience, ask questions, and share ideas with colleagues, the Demonstration Classroom host teacher(s), and the Facilitator.
4. **Action Planning:** A “so what/now what” action planning time for applying the learning to your specific teaching context.
5. **Follow Up:** An opportunity to apply new learning to the visiting teacher’s classroom practice with observation and feedback (Dugan, 2012).

This program evaluation of the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience is formative and improvement-oriented. Patton (2008) states that, “improvement-oriented approaches tend to be more open-ended, gathering varieties of data about strengths and weaknesses with the expectation that both will be found and each can be used in an ongoing cycle of reflection and innovation” (p. 116). Therefore, the purpose of the study is to determine the overall effectiveness of the program, including strengths and weaknesses, and teacher perceptions of the program.

As a building administrator in BSD32, I am interested in supporting the expansion of the program throughout the district, as well as in bringing awareness of this type of professional learning to the public and other educational leaders. I strongly believe that all school systems would benefit from this kind of professional learning.

Rationale

Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) studied effective teacher development in the United States and other nations and found that several key components are necessary for teacher professional development to change

instructional practice and improve student learning in the classroom. Among the most essential components are the need for the learning experience to be ongoing, to be connected to practice, to be aligned to school improvement goals, and to result in stronger relationships among the adults in the school (p. 9-11). When professional learning integrates these components, it can be a very powerful force for improving instruction and impacting student achievement. All too often, however, professional development in schools is random or fragmented, leading to little or no impact on teacher effectiveness in the classroom. Darling-Hammond et al., (2009) warn professional developers away from providing the “occasional, one-shot workshops” that have been deemed ineffective by decades of research. However, around the country, teachers identify this kind of professional development experience to be the most frequent professional development opportunity offered to them (Little, 2006). Meaningful professional development should be directly related to school, district, or teacher needs and should be job-embedded (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Easton, 2005; Stewart, 2014). In this manner, professional development will have the greatest impact on student learning.

Demonstration Classrooms are one way to provide such meaningful professional learning experiences for teachers. As a school principal, I am passionate about providing professional development that can truly transform instruction and that teachers are excited about attending and applying directly to their classrooms. Through my participation in Demonstration Classroom observations over the past two years, I have seen many teachers learn new instructional practices that they have immediately applied to their classrooms. I have found this professional learning experience to be the most impactful experience in which I have participated and I am hopeful that this program

evaluation will bring about more awareness of the benefits of the program, as well as find ways to make the program even better for teachers.

In summary, in this era of constant change in the field of education, educational leaders must be willing to put in the time and effort required to help teachers and staff become more competent and comfortable with the new standards, new evaluation process, and new instructional practices. A good portion of every school district's budget is spent each year on professional development for teachers. However, because these funds are limited, all educational leaders need to spend their money on those professional learning experiences that are most effective in impacting teacher instructional practice and student learning. Brighton School District 32 believes the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience is both a cost-efficient and highly effective means of delivering professional development to adult learners.

Goals of the Program Evaluation

The Director of Instructional Services, who serves as the Demonstration Classroom Facilitator, and I agreed upon three goals for this formative, improvement-oriented program evaluation. They are to:

- determine the effectiveness of the Demonstration Classroom professional learning program in meeting its stated goals (listed below),
- determine the strengths and weaknesses of the program,
- and determine the perceptions of the participants in the program.

In designing the evaluation around these three goals, we will be able to make improvements to the program so that it is most beneficial to the participants. The Demonstration Classroom program has six goals, as follows:

- To build efficacy and teacher leadership among the Demonstration Classroom host teachers
- To share best practice instruction and assist teachers in improving their instructional practice
- To increase collaborative culture in the schools
- To positively impact student outcomes by improving instructional practice
- To ensure that professional learning is applied and consistently implemented
- To give support to teachers in implementing the District 32 High-Priority Initiatives

All data gathered through quantitative and qualitative measures will be directly related to the goals of the program evaluation.

Research Questions

James, Milenkiewicz, and Bucknam (2008) assert that research questions should be significant, manageable, clearly stated, self-reflective, and neutral (p. 46). It is essential that the primary research question is not too complex so that it may serve as the “north star” to guide all decisions that will need to be made throughout the evaluation. Therefore, the primary research question for this study will be: “How effective is the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience in meeting its stated goals?”

Secondary, or related, questions will address the stated goals of the Demonstration Classroom program. These include:

- How has the Demonstration Classroom program impacted teacher efficacy and leadership?
- How has the Demonstration Classroom program impacted instructional practice?

- Has the Demonstration Classroom program had an effect on teacher collaboration in the school?
- Has participation in the Demonstration Classroom program helped clarify or give support to teacher implementation of the District 32 High-Priority Initiatives?

SECTION TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This study seeks to determine the effectiveness of the Demonstration Classroom professional development program in Brighton School District 32 (BSD32). There has been little published about this particular professional development program, but many parallels can be made between Demonstration Classrooms and other more common forms of teacher professional development. Before determining if this program is effective, it is important to understand what the literature says about effective professional development in the field of education. There has been much research done surrounding the most effective forms of teacher professional development. In this literature review, I will discuss the findings of this body of research and make connections between the elements of effective teacher professional development and the Demonstration Classroom professional development program. In addition, several related topics, teacher collaboration, peer observation, and lesson study, will be discussed as they have informed and influenced the field of teacher professional development as well.

Demonstration Classrooms

Grose and Strachan (2011) studied the Demonstration Classroom program that has been in place in the Toronto, Canada public schools since 2008. This study informed the BSD32 leadership team in its decision to implement Demonstration Classrooms. The purpose of demonstration classrooms within the Toronto District School Board was to, “support student achievement by building instructional excellence through the sharing of knowledge and practice” (p. 24-25). Teachers across the district were invited to observe lessons in their colleagues’ classrooms, then debrief and discuss the lesson immediately

afterwards with the host teacher. Each visiting teacher set individual learning goals for the day to allow for complete personalization of the learning experience. The authors of the study surveyed more than 1,700 teachers who participated in Demonstration Classrooms and found that 94% of participants believed that the Demonstration Classroom experience had a meaningful impact on their teaching practice. Furthermore, teachers believed Demonstration Classrooms enabled a higher level of collaboration around effective practice and greater support for new teachers. It is clear that within this large school district, Demonstration Classrooms were considered a highly effective form of professional development for all staff. To replicate this level of satisfaction and meaningful learning in other settings, however, it is important to determine which elements of the Demonstration Classroom professional development program make it such a success.

Effective Teacher Professional Development

In the world of education today, there are so many changes with which to contend—new standards, new accountability assessments, and new teacher evaluation plans, just to name a few—that teachers can find themselves frustrated, burned out, and confused about what and how to teach. To combat this negative effect, school districts must provide high quality professional learning experiences that support teachers in their areas of need. Extensive research exists that sheds light on the most effective and impactful components of teacher professional development. Some of that body of research is discussed below.

Little (2006) states that schools are most effective for students when they emphasize effective professional learning for teachers. For that professional learning to

be effective for teachers, it must meet four goals: be connected to the school's central goals and priorities; increase the skills, knowledge, and ability to teach to high standards; improve collaboration among adults; and affirm teachers' commitment to teaching (p. 2-3). High-quality professional development experiences must be in-depth and sustained over time. In addition, providing teachers with the opportunity to form networks or study groups with others, either inside or outside the school/district, increases the effectiveness of the professional development. When the learning experience takes place during the course of the typical school day in a naturally occurring context, it is more apt to lead to long-term learning and change.

Finally, lesson study, peer observation, and/or video clubs where teachers are able to watch their colleagues teach a lesson to students is impactful to both teacher practice and student achievement in the classroom. The Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience meets the four goals outlined by Little, and therefore is aligned with the effective professional development experiences recommended to have the most impact on teaching and learning.

Borko (2004) analyzed relevant research on teacher professional development to determine the answer to two questions: "What do we know about professional development programs and their impact on teacher learning?" and "What are important directions and strategies for extending our knowledge?" (p. 3). In this search, evidence was found that certain forms of professional learning had a positive impact on teacher learning. Those professional learning activities that include opportunities for teachers to strengthen knowledge of the subjects they teach, deepen understanding of how students learn and think, and focus extensively on instructional practice are most impactful. Borko

gives several examples of professional learning experiences that meet these criteria, including: curriculum-based professional development like “Developing Mathematical Ideas,” teachers teaching other teachers through projects like “The National Writing Project,” and focus on how students learn through programs like “Cognitively Guided Instruction.” Each of these examples has been shown to positively impact teacher learning and instructional practice in the classroom (p. 6-11). By focusing on instructional practice and student learning, as well as by empowering teachers to teach each other, the Demonstration Classroom program mirrors many of the effective programs discussed in this study.

In her text on professional development in the field of education, *Leading Adult Learning*, Drago-Severson (2009) asserts that school leaders must learn how to become effective educators of adults to establish a supportive environment where teachers can grow and develop together. Because adults have different skills, preferences, and learning needs, professional development at the school level should be differentiated and personalized for each learner. She challenges school leaders to make their schools “true learning centers” (p. 22) for adults to impact student achievement and foster teacher development by implementing the four pillar practices for growth: teaming, providing adults with leadership roles, engaging in collegial inquiry, and mentoring (p. 25-26).

Teaming creates an environment for adults to share their ideas and practice, to question their own beliefs and assumptions, and to consider perspectives different from their own. Providing leadership roles for adults empowers them to make decisions and to be responsible for other adults, leading to new learning and development. Engaging in collegial inquiry is a process of shared reflection that helps all adults in the group to learn

from each other. Mentoring gives veteran staff the opportunity to share expertise, and often results in new learning for both the mentor and mentee. Three of these pillar practices are also present in the Demonstration Classroom learning experience, making the Demonstration Classroom aligned with Drago-Severson's research on effective professional learning.

These practices differ significantly from the traditional "sit-and-get" workshop approach to professional development that is common in most schools across the country. In each of these pillar practices, teachers learn from and with each other through active participation. These practices also allow for professional learning to be directly connected to the daily work of teachers, and value the knowledge and skills of each adult. Each of these elements of professional development have been shown to be most effective and impactful for teacher instructional practice as well as student achievement (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

DuFour (2004) advises school leaders not to separate adult learning from the day-to-day teaching of students during the school year. He explains that setting aside four or five professional development days in the school calendar is not effective, as it is not directly related to what is happening in classrooms with students the other 180 days of the year. DuFour also asserts that professional learning for teachers should be embedded into their daily teaching experiences to achieve maximum impact. Four questions can be addressed to determine if professional development will be effective and transform teaching and learning in the classroom:

- Does the professional development increase the staff's collective capacity to achieve the school's vision and goals?

- Does the school's approach to staff development challenge staff members to act in new ways?
- Does the school's approach to staff development focus on results rather than activities?
- Does the school's approach to staff development demonstrate a sustained commitment to achieving important goals? (p. 63-64)

When professional development is directly tied to the school improvement plan and goals, when it involves application of new learning within the classroom, when evidence can be collected that the learning increases student achievement, and when the learning is implemented for a long period of time, then the effectiveness and positive impact of the professional development experience will be maximized. Demonstration Classrooms contain the elements of effective professional development discussed in the literature above. Another component of Demonstration Classrooms that must be analyzed to maximize effectiveness is the element of teacher collaboration.

Teacher Collaboration

Heifetz and Laurie (1997) describe adaptive challenges as those problems for which no solutions exist. When faced with adaptive challenges, employees must be able to band together and collaborate to share ideas and find solutions as a group. This advice is particularly applicable in today's educational context, when teachers and administrators are faced with more and more complex issues and demands. Research on effective professional development often points to teachers working in teams or groups as impactful learning environments (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; DuFour, 2004; Little, 2006). One goal of the Demonstration Classroom professional development

program in BSD32 is to increase collaboration among the teaching staff. Therefore, to determine the effectiveness of that program, it is essential to review the literature on teacher collaboration in the field of education.

In *Professional Capital*, Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) discuss how to improve teaching and learning in schools, transform a broken system, and bring educators together so as to be seen by the public as professionals rather than as scapegoats blamed for many of the problems in education today. The authors introduce the concept of professional capital, which is made up of three other kinds of capital: human, social, and decisional. Human capital is defined as the knowledge and talent that people possess, social capital is the combined knowledge and talent of a group, and decisional capital is the power to make decisions in complex situations (p. 3-5).

Hargreaves and Fullan explain that to increase and accelerate the learning of the individual, one must concentrate on the learning of a group. In other words, people learn more, faster, when they work together in groups. Not all group work is equal, however, so certain conditions must be in place to become the kind of high quality interaction that leads to this acceleration of learning. For example, there must be time set aside for the teachers to meet together; they must have access to ongoing, timely student data to analyze; the leader of the group must be effective and consistent; and there must be opportunity for group members to learn from each other in the classroom setting.

Hargreaves and Fullan further explain that individualism in schools can lead to mediocre results: “Individual teacher autonomy ‘behind the classroom door’ is a license to be brilliant, but also to be abominable or just plain bland” (p. 110). They point to a study by Rosenholtz (1991), who found that there are two kinds of schools: stuck schools

and moving schools. In moving schools, student achievement levels were higher, teachers were more confident, and they felt more supported by their colleagues. In moving schools, collaborative cultures existed. Without this collaboration, schools were stuck and had lower student achievement and lower levels of teacher satisfaction.

While Hargreaves and Fullan argue teacher collaboration as necessary for the development of professional capital in the field of education, they also warn against the dangers of surface-level collaboration. They cite two forms of ineffective collaboration that must be avoided. First, “balkanization” (p. 115) is a negative form of collaboration in which small groups of teachers band together to form cliques. In balkanized schools, teachers do not seek to learn from all staff, but instead insulate themselves within their small group. Communication between groups is poor, leading to mediocre and inconsistent practice throughout the school.

Another example of poor teacher collaboration lies in what the authors refer to as “contrived collegiality” (p. 117). An example of contrived collegiality is the icebreaker activity that is frequently present on staff meeting agendas. They are superficial exercises that do not lead to real collaboration among staff to transform teaching and learning in the school; instead they force colleagues to interact with each other for no real purpose. It is important to ward against these ineffective forms of collaboration in a school and instead aim for the kind of meaningful collaborative culture in which teachers support and push each other to learn more, do better, and reach higher.

Human and social capital are also the focus in “The Missing Link in School Reform” (Leana, 2011). Leana discusses what she believes to be the most effective means to enact school reform: teacher collaboration. She points to research she and her

team conducted within several large urban school districts, which shows no relationship between teachers' accumulation of advanced coursework and degrees and improvement in student achievement (Leana & Pil, 2006). However, she states that a link can be shown between increases in meaningful forms of collaboration, or social capital, and student achievement. This study has shown that when teachers increase their knowledge and skills individually, the benefits do not transfer meaningfully to students. However, when teachers come together authentically to learn and grow as a team, both students and teachers benefit. The Demonstration Classroom program is an example of teachers learning with and from each other, and thus an example of social capital at work.

Another large-scale study points to the impact of teacher collaboration on student achievement. Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) studied the levels of collaboration amongst teaching staff in 52 elementary schools within a large urban district in the Midwestern United States to determine if collaboration made a difference in student performance. They administered surveys to teachers and collected demographic and student achievement data from all students enrolled in the schools. After controlling for student demographic variables, they found that teacher collaboration was a “statistically significant predictor of variability” in both reading and mathematics achievement (p. 889). The researchers believe the link between collaboration and student achievement to be indirect; that the likely outcome of collaboration is improved instructional practice, which then impacts student achievement.

This study, and others like it, shows the importance of ensuring that teachers have time to meet together and use that time most effectively to impact teaching and learning in the school. Teacher collaboration is a key element of the Demonstration Classroom,

but peer observation is an essential component as well. To determine the effectiveness of Demonstration Classrooms, it is important to determine if teacher observation of others is a meaningful endeavor.

Peer Observation

At the heart of the Demonstration Classroom is the opportunity for a group of teachers to observe another teacher conduct a lesson in his/her classroom. The benefits, as well as challenges, of this kind of “show-and-tell” method to professional learning have been well documented in the literature (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Little, 2006). However, the Demonstration Classroom attempts to make peer observation more meaningful by ensuring that all observers enter the experience with a learning goal that helps to focus their attention. An example of a learning goal might be to observe questioning techniques to find a variety of approaches to increase student participation. In addition, observers are required to apply their new learning within their own classrooms within a few weeks and are given support by the facilitator, who organizes all Demonstration Classroom sessions, and colleagues who attended the same observation.

Many benefits of peer observation of teaching have been documented. Kohut, Burnap, and Yon (2007) state that a goal of an effective peer observation program is to develop a clear and consistent view of what effective teaching and learning looks like. When all teachers are “on the same page” with expectations, it benefits the students and staff alike. Hendry and Oliver (2012) found that observers reported more benefits in peer observation than those being observed. Observing others succeed in a task increased self-efficacy, which led the observers to rate the peer observation process as a worthy form of

professional development. In addition, observers often learned new teaching strategies that they could immediately apply in their own classrooms. Observers indicated that they were more likely to try a new strategy or method after seeing it in action, rather than after just discussing it with a colleague (p. 6-9).

DiVall et al. (2012) noted many benefits of a peer observation program in a college of pharmacy. Survey results indicated that 94% of those surveyed found peer observation had a positive impact their instruction. In addition, 100% of those surveyed perceived an increase in student learning as a result of participation in a peer observation program. DiVall et al. advise others to put in place proper structures, such as faculty training on the observation process, as well as standard forms for pre-observation and post-observation meetings, to get the most benefit from peer observation. In addition, Kohut, Burnap, and Yon (2007) found that observers who has been trained in the observation process gave more constructive and critical feedback, which lead to greater learning and growth on the part of the observed teachers.

Finally, Shortland (2010) and Karagiorgi (2012) emphasize the importance of trusting relationships between the observer and observed to maximize the benefits of the peer observation program. When peer observation partners act as “critical friends,” and have a trusting and supportive relationship, the benefits will be increased for both (Shortland, 2010, p. 297). Furthermore, when peer observation is not mandated, but instead encouraged by supervisors, and when teachers are given the opportunity to partner with a colleague of their choice, it is most beneficial.

While peer observation of teaching can be a very effective form of professional development for teachers, some drawbacks to this practice exist. Karagiorgi (2012) notes

that teachers who have not been well trained in how to remain objective during observation will struggle to eliminate judgment and evaluation in their feedback. For example, Karagiorgi's study of six primary teachers in Cyprus found that suggestions and feedback given to the observed teachers was mostly positive and superficial in nature, leading to less impact for teachers who were observed (p. 451). Finally, when teachers were forced to participate in peer observations or were assigned partners with whom they did not have a trusting relationship, the program was less likely to impact instruction or student learning.

Shortland (2010) corroborates these claims and explains that a "top-down approach" to peer observation, where supervisors mandate participation in the program, can make some teachers nervous and fearful that the process will impact their evaluations. This fear and anxiety leads to more negative perceptions of peer observation than positive. Shortland also warns that teachers must be trained in giving feedback prior to the implementation of such a program to help teachers give meaningful constructive feedback that will not ruin relationships (p. 302).

In a study of a peer observation program in a university setting, Hendry and Oliver (2012) found that some observers had negative experiences concluding they would never be able to do what they observed their colleague doing during the observation. Those teachers cited differences in instructor personality, course level, and student demographics as barriers that could not be overcome in their own classrooms. In this way, neither the observer nor the observed benefitted from the process. One way to reduce this tendency would be to ensure that peer observation partners teach similar content, age groups, or class sizes so that application to each setting can be easily seen.

The Demonstration Classroom includes several components that emphasize the benefits discussed above in the literature on peer observation, and that reduce the drawbacks. For example, participation in the program is optional, and participants can choose the grade level or subject area they would like to observe. Moreover, the debrief discussion at the conclusion of a lesson is facilitated by a trained evaluator who is skilled at drawing out feedback from observers that is meaningful and constructive. Each of these components of the Demonstration Classroom makes it more likely to be an effective form of professional development for teachers. One form of professional development that includes peer observation as a component is lesson study. A review of the effectiveness of lesson study will inform this study on the effectiveness of Demonstration Classrooms.

Lesson Study

Lesson Study Process

Teachers in Japan, and many other nations, spend more time planning lessons together and less time in the classroom with students than teachers in the United States (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). One form of professional development considered highly effective in Japan, lesson study, has made its way into United States schools in the past few decades. Japanese lesson study is a process similar to the Demonstration Classroom, so it is beneficial to compare the two professional development approaches.

Japanese lesson study has gained in popularity throughout the United States and other countries outside of Japan due to the low cost associated with its implementation, as well as its emphasis on collaborative lesson planning and analysis of teaching and learning in the classroom (Doig & Groves, 2011). The lesson study cycle has four phases

closely related to the Demonstration Classroom process. They are: goal setting and planning the lesson; teaching the research lesson, allowing for observers; the post-lesson discussion; and the resulting learning and its application to future instruction (p. 79-80).

An important element of Japanese lesson study is the relation of the lesson being studied to a long-term school-wide goal. This is similar to the “problem of practice” in the Instructional Rounds process (City et al., 2009). An example of a long-term goal that could be explored through lesson study is improving students’ curiosity (Doig & Groves, 2001, p. 80). Maintaining a focus on an identified area of student need is at the heart of lesson study and has been considered instrumental in the success of this form of professional development. Unfortunately, this element is most often left out when lesson study has been utilized in countries outside of Japan (Doig & Groves, 2001, p. 80). Focusing on a school-wide goal as the basis for lesson study is aligned with the research on effective professional development discussed above.

Another element of lesson study essential for success is an extensive research period. Teachers in Japan spend much time researching the instructional methods, lesson content and subject matter, and student understandings and ways of thinking. After thoroughly researching and preparing the lesson, the teachers have a better understanding of how to teach the content effectively and are better able to identify areas for student misconception during the lesson. During a post-observation reflective discussion, a facilitator asks the teacher to describe his/her thought process during instruction and give background to the observers. Observers are then able to ask questions and give suggestions for future lessons (Doig & Groves, 2011). This kind of reflective discussion is also present in the Demonstration Classroom, and is considered by many participants to

be one of the most impactful parts of the learning experience because it allows the entire group of teachers to learn from and with each other.

Challenges Associated with Lesson Study

Though lesson study has proven to be an effective form of teacher professional development throughout Japan (Chassels & Melville, 2009; Doig & Groves, 2011; Rock & Wilson, 2005), it has had varying degrees of success in the United States. Lewis (2000) reminds those in the field of education why proper implementation is important: “The graveyards of U.S. educational reform are littered with once-promising innovations that were poorly understood, superficially implemented, and consequently pronounced ineffective” (p. 33). If lesson study is not implemented as planned, teachers may see less success in sustained learning over time. Because the entire process of lesson study may be daunting to those new to the experience, Doig and Groves advise teachers to start slow by first beginning the process of collaborative planning with a colleague, and then add other elements until the entire process has been implemented. The flexibility of the process and alignment with school improvement plans and goals make it an ideal form of sustained professional learning for teachers, if barriers to implementation can be overcome.

In their study of the implementation of lesson study into a pre-service teacher education program, Chassels and Melville (2009) found there were many challenges in the structures and systems in place in American schools that make the lesson study experience difficult to put into effect. For example, teachers in the study found that there was not enough time in the day to collaborate meaningfully with colleagues to research and plan a lesson. Furthermore, some school schedules made it difficult to plan a time to

observe in others' classrooms. Additionally, teachers in small schools where there was not a colleague with a similar grade level or subject matter assignment struggled to participate meaningfully in lesson study. Teachers who identified themselves as introverted and as having a preference to work alone were uncomfortable with the collaboration and less likely to enjoy inviting others into their classrooms to observe and provide feedback. These challenges are not insurmountable and can easily be overcome through careful planning prior to implementation of a lesson study initiative.

Benefits of Lesson Study

Though some challenges exist in putting lesson study into practice, the benefits of participation in such an experience have been extolled. Chassels and Melville (2009) found that despite some difficulties getting lesson study in place, teachers identified many strengths of the experience. Teachers discovered that increased collaboration with colleagues was beneficial to their instructional practice. Moreover, they believed that placing emphasis on reflection of a lesson helped them grow in their skill and confidence in teaching. In addition, teachers increased in their ability to both give and receive feedback. Each of these outcomes shows a connection between the professional development experience and instructional practice in the classroom.

A study conducted by Rock and Wilson (2005) found that the benefits of lesson study can be increased when certain structures and supports are in place to support teachers in this process. For example, the school in this study had partnered with a local university. The school received grant money to cover expenses for substitute teachers and give stipends to participating teachers when extended planning and report writing was involved. Additionally, a professor from the university served as facilitator of the process

and gave support and training to teachers when needed. With these supports in place, all six teacher participants in the study found lesson study to be overwhelmingly beneficial to their practice their ability to meet the individual needs of their students increased as a result of participation in lesson study (p. 89-91). While these supports are not feasible to implement in every school, some may be replicable in other settings, and may increase the benefits of the lesson study experience.

Japanese lesson study has many of the same elements of professional development that the Demonstration Classroom program contains, namely teacher observation and immediate debrief and reflection on the lesson. Reviewing research related to the benefits and drawbacks of lesson study gives direction to how best to implement the Demonstration Classroom program to see the greatest impact on teaching and learning.

Summary

Effective professional development for teachers can truly transform teaching and learning within one teacher's classroom, or within an entire school or district, depending on its implementation. The Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience in BSD32 attempts to transform teachers throughout the district into highly effective educators whose students demonstrate maximum growth each year. This study seeks to determine the effectiveness of the Demonstration Classroom program through an exploration of teacher perceptions of their involvement in the program. Furthermore, the study attempts to determine what, if any, impact involvement in the program has on teacher efficacy, collaboration, and instructional practice. The following section discusses the research design and methods of data collection.

SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

After consulting with the intended users of this evaluation, a mixed methods approach to data collection was determined to be most appropriate. Intended users, according to Patton (2008), are the people who will use the results of the evaluation to make decisions about the program. Intended users include the Director of Instructional Services, the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent for Learning in the district, as well as the members of the BSD32 Board of Education. When the team met together to discuss the evaluation design, the decision was made to have multiple data sources so as to triangulate data sources for a deeper interpretation and increased validity of findings. Therefore, the team decided to utilize both quantitative and qualitative methods as complementary perspectives.

To begin, an electronic survey was sent to all teachers who have participated in the Demonstration Classroom learning experience in BSD32 during the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years (see Appendix A). The purpose of the survey was to gather teacher perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of being involved in the Demonstration Classroom experience. After analyzing the survey data for patterns and trends in teacher perceptions of the program, focus group interviews with teacher volunteers were conducted. Focus group questions delved more deeply into how teachers' instructional practice had changed, whether or not participation in the program had increased their collaboration with colleagues, their efficacy, and leadership abilities, and whether participation in the program helped clarify their understanding of the District 32 high-priority initiatives (see Appendix B).

In addition, to gain more insight on how being a Demonstration Classroom host teacher increases teacher efficacy and leadership abilities, a host teacher was asked to complete a reflective journal throughout the process. Intended users analyzed and interpreted data together as part of the participatory action research process.

Participants

Of the 186 certified teachers in Brighton School District 32, 51 teachers have participated in the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience over the past two years. A survey was sent to all 51 teachers, 38 of whom responded to provide their thoughts and perceptions on participation in the program. For focus group interviews, nine teachers were asked to participate in two small groups. Only teachers who had participated in Demonstration Classrooms during the 2013-14 school year were asked to participate in focus group interviews so that they would be able to remember more specific information about their experiences. Finally, one Demonstration Classroom host teacher was asked to participate in the completion of a reflective journal throughout the experience between October 3 and November 6, 2014.

Data Gathering Techniques

Survey

To determine teacher perceptions of the Demonstration Classroom program, an electronic survey was administered through Survey Monkey. Using Survey Monkey was advantageous for two reasons: first, it provided participants with the knowledge that their responses would remain anonymous; and second, the program immediately analyzed survey responses into easy-to-understand charts and graphs. Survey results were analyzed

to find trends and patterns that were delved more deeply into to find out the “how” and “why” during focus group interviews and reflective journaling.

James et al. (2008) offer many suggestions on survey construction and distribution. They encourage evaluators to test survey questions in advance in order to “provide consistent measures in comparable circumstances” (p. 106). Additionally, it is important to think strategically about the rating scales utilized in the survey. A four-point Likert-scale was used to eliminate a neutral, or no-opinion, response. It was beneficial to the research to force the Demonstration Classroom teachers to choose either a positive or negative response to have a better understanding of their perceptions of the program. The survey was piloted with a small group of four teachers to gather opinions about the question wording and the ratings available prior to distribution to the entire group. Once the informal feedback was gathered, revisions were made to the survey and it was sent out to the 51 Demonstration Classroom participants.

The brief survey included 11 structured statements and five open-ended questions. Respondents read statements related to the stated goals of the Demonstration Classroom program and chose the rating they believe best represents their perceptions after participating in the program. Comment boxes were placed after the structured statements to encourage teachers to expand upon their thoughts. After the survey data were gathered, comments were coded to find patterns and themes. Demographic information was also gathered to more accurately describe the sample, as well as to be able to disaggregate the data by school, grade level, or department.

Focus Groups

Qualitative data is useful for this program evaluation in that it helped interpret the “how” and “why” of the survey results. That is, qualitative data helps to “get the story” behind the numbers. Because adult learning and classroom instruction are complex processes, it makes most sense to gather qualitative data to better understand the effectiveness of the Demonstration Classroom learning experience. After the survey was administered to all Demonstration Classroom participants, volunteers who had participated in a Demonstration Classroom within the last year were solicited to participate in focus groups of four to five teachers. Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted to allow for a certain amount of structure, but also the, “opportunity to digress from the primary question...to understand more clearly what is seen as a provocative remark...” (James et al., 2008, p. 73). This flexibility allowed a more natural discussion to take place with participants. Rather than taking notes during discussion, the conversations were recorded and transcribed later. Recording the conversations freed all members to participate more fully in the interviews and also seemed to help the teachers feel more at ease during the focus groups without someone scribbling down every word they said as they were speaking.

Reflective Journaling

James et al. (2008) describe reflective journaling as a way to gather data throughout a process of change. This proved to be an excellent way of gaining an in-depth look at the journey of a Demonstration Classroom host teacher as she began the process of consulting with the Facilitator, refining lessons and methods of instruction, hosting the Demonstration Classroom, and then debriefing with the Demonstration

Classroom participants. A reflective journal allowed the team to peer inside the thoughts of the host teacher and truly determine if the host teachers experience greater efficacy and leadership skills as a result of their participation in the process. The Demonstration Classroom teacher was asked to reflect weekly upon her thoughts about participating in the process and how it affected her daily classroom instruction, leadership skills, and efficacy as a teacher. This data could be influential in spreading the word to the larger community about the benefits of teacher-led professional learning experiences.

Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were gathered through the teacher survey. The survey was administered to 51 Demonstration Classroom participants. Patton (2008, p. 473-474) recommends having the team determine “standards of desirability” prior to viewing the results to reduce the biased interpretations that sometimes come from people who are fully invested and emotionally attached to a particular program. Because I, as a four-time participant in Demonstration Classrooms, could be viewed as emotionally attached to this particular program, I found it important to determine in advance the levels at which I would consider the program highly effective, adequate, and inadequate. To interpret the results more easily, each response was first coded with a number. The most positive result was coded with a number four, while the negative response was coded with a number one. It was determined that results of a Level 3.5 or higher would indicate that the program has been highly effective; results from 3.0 – 3.49 would indicate that the program was adequate; and results below a 3.0 would be inadequate.

The data were analyzed for patterns and trends to determine the kinds of questions to ask teachers during the focus groups. During the planning phase, the determination was made that the data would be disaggregated by demographics to search for patterns in the data by grade level or school. For example, if one school's participants were less satisfied with the Demonstration Classroom experience than others, then I would have been able to use that information to develop a focus group with teachers from that school to find out more information about how the program in that school could be improved.

Qualitative Analysis

I collected qualitative data through two methods: focus group interviews and reflective journaling. Prior to reviewing the data, the primary and secondary research questions were reviewed to focus the review. I then analyzed the responses looking for themes that arose in Demonstration Classroom participants' comments, as related to the research questions, and sorted responses according to those themes. James et al. (2008) suggest using codes to summarize the data or highlight important information. Coding helped simplify this large amount of qualitative data into more manageable chunks and aided in the interpretation of the data.

Finally, I attempted to triangulate summary data by reviewing survey, focus group, and reflective journal data. After thematically classifying the data, I worked with the Demonstration Classroom Facilitator to interpret results, make judgments, and offer recommendations for improvement of the Demonstration Classroom program. Results were presented in paper form, and an oral presentation was offered at all school campuses in the district.

Limitations of the Study

Before discussing the findings of the study, it is important to recognize the limitations of this program evaluation. An obvious limitation is the fact that I am deeply involved with the Demonstration Classroom program in my role as a building principal in BSD32. I have attended several Demonstration Classroom lessons over the past three years and I have encouraged many of my teachers to attend. I have been a proponent of the Demonstration Classroom program since its inception. The potential for me, as the researcher, to be too close to the program to see the negatives may be a concern. However, my allegiance to the program also makes me want to uncover all the negative aspects in order to improve it to be the best professional learning experience possible.

Another limitation to the study is my role as an evaluator of some of the teachers who volunteered to participate in the focus group interviews. I purposely did not solicit teachers individually to reduce the pressure some may feel to participate if I am their evaluator. Because the teachers were free to make their own decisions about being part of the focus group interviews and were clearly told that they could withdraw at any time, I do not believe my role as an evaluator would have tainted any of the results; however, the evaluator relationship must be addressed as a potential limitation.

Finally, the size and scope of this study make it difficult to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience in other settings beyond BSD32. Because we are a very small district with only three schools and fewer than 200 teachers, more research would need to be done to determine if the program would be as effective in larger settings with a more diverse staff. Additionally, the small sample size made it challenging for me to gather student

achievement information to determine if participation in the Demonstration Classroom program had any effect on student outcomes, so I did not include student achievement results in this study.

SECTION FOUR: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

The primary goal of this formative study was to determine the effectiveness of the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience in BSD32. To answer this question, both quantitative and qualitative data were gathered. First, an electronic survey containing 16 questions was sent to all teachers who had participated in Demonstration Classrooms during the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years. Thirty-eight of 51 teachers (74.5%) responded to the survey. Next, two focus group interviews were conducted with teachers who had participated in Demonstration Classrooms within the past year. The focus group interviews included a mix of teachers who had been only observers and others who had been both observers and Demonstration Classroom host teachers. Themes and patterns that emerged from the survey data were discussed in greater detail in the small groups. Finally, one Demonstration Classroom host teacher completed a reflective journal weekly during her experience of planning, delivering, and debriefing upon a demonstration lesson.

In this section, I first discuss survey data collected and significant findings that came from a thorough analysis of the results. Next, qualitative data from the focus group interviews and reflective journal, broken down into themes, are presented.

Survey Results

A survey was designed to determine the overall perceptions of teachers who had participated in the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience during the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years. While sixty teachers had participated in the program over the two-year period, nine of those teachers left the district before the survey was

administered. Fifty-one Kindergarten through eighth grade teachers were sent the electronic survey, and responses were received from 38 teachers. Results of each question in the survey are discussed below.

Demographics

Basic demographic data were gathered to determine if patterns and trends in perceptions of the program were noticed with teachers at certain schools, grade levels, or in teaching experience. The first question in this section asked teachers to identify the school in which they worked. The school with the highest percentage of survey respondents was Taft Elementary School with 55.88%. 23.53% of respondents identified Jackson Elementary as their home school and 20.59% of teachers chose Brighton Middle School. These results are somewhat surprising in that a much higher percentage of teachers from Taft Elementary School responded to the survey as compared to the overall percentage of teachers from that school that had participated in Demonstration Classrooms. A possible reason for the higher response rate from teachers at Taft Elementary School is that I am a building principal in that school, so teachers were able to see me in person to ask questions about the intentions of the survey. In fact, at least five teachers sought me out in the building to ask questions about this study, most regarding the anonymity of the survey responses, before agreeing to participate.

The next demographic question asked teachers to identify the grade level of students they primarily teach. 51.52% of teachers responded that they worked with intermediate level students (in grades 3 – 5). This percentage is much higher than the number of teachers who work with intermediate level students in the entire sample of teachers who had participated in the Demonstration Classroom program. Again, my

involvement in the study may have been a contributing factor in these results. I am the direct supervisor for the intermediate grades at Taft Elementary School, and because those teachers have a relationship with me, they may have felt more comfortable responding to the survey as a result.

The final demographic question asked teachers to identify how many years of teaching experience they have. The majority of teachers (58.82%) have between five and 10 years of teaching experience. 29.41% of teachers indicated that they had more than 10 years experience, while the lowest percentage, 11.76%, of teachers had been teaching four years or fewer. These results are not surprising, as teachers in years one to four are non-tenured in the district, and as a result may feel less comfortable sharing their opinions and perceptions of the program. Additionally, the average number of years of experience for all teachers in BSD32 for the 2012-13 school year was 9.9 years. Because there are fewer teachers in the district with more than 10 years of experience, it makes sense that less than one-third of respondents had more than 10 years of experience.

After disaggregating the survey results by demographic data, one interesting observation was made. While the data from both elementary schools were similar, one survey respondent who identified Brighton Middle School as his or her home school found the Demonstration Classroom experience to be less satisfying than most other survey respondents. This individual marked “not at all” and “somewhat disagree” for each structured question discussed below. It is important to recognize that one middle school participant found the experience to be unsatisfying and unrelated to his/her teaching experience. A potential reason for the dissatisfaction could be that there were fewer Demonstration Classroom lessons provided at the middle school level, so this

teacher may have observed a lesson at a grade level far from his or her teaching assignment and may have had trouble determining how to replicate any or all strategies observed in the different setting.

Structured Statements

Eight statements were developed to gauge teachers’ overall perceptions of the Demonstration Classroom experience. The program’s six goals were incorporated into the questions so that the research team would be able to determine the effectiveness of the program in meeting each of its intended goals. Each of the eight statements also included optional comment boxes for teachers to expand upon their answers if desired.

Table 1

Statement 1: The Demonstration Classroom experience helped me reflect on ways to enhance my practice.

Not at all	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Total Responses	Average Rating
2.78%	0.00%	27.78%	69.44%	36	3.64

Doig and Groves, through their research of lesson study in Japanese schools, assert that as a result of participating in lesson study, teachers increased their use of self-reflection, “which enabled them to capture their own learning” (2011, p. 89). In this way, researchers found lesson study participants to be more thoughtful in their own lesson planning as a result of that experience. One goal of the Demonstration Classroom experience is to increase self-reflection to impact participants’ instructional practice. 97.22% of respondents found the Demonstration Classroom to have helped them reflect upon ways to enhance their own teaching practice. Only one respondent indicated that it did not at all help him/her reflect upon teaching practice, and one survey respondent

skipped this statement. The average rating for this response was 3.64 out of 4.0 points, which met criteria for showing evidence that the Demonstration Classroom was “highly effective” in achieving this goal.

Because reflection on the Demonstration Classroom lesson is part of the debriefing process, it is no surprise that nearly 100% of teachers indicated that they reflected upon their practice. Sixteen teachers added comments after this question and nearly all of them were positive responses to the question. One teacher commented, “I was able to see new methods (of instruction) in use and implement and modify them as I saw fit for my classroom and students’ needs.” Another mentioned, “This was a very reflective opportunity for teachers. It opened up my eyes to a new way of teaching which changed the way I (taught a close read) in my classroom.”

Only one negative comment was left for this statement, perhaps explaining why one teacher found that the Demonstration Classroom experience did not help a teacher reflect upon his/her own practice. One teacher explained that “(the) grade level was too far from my own” to allow for reflection. This comment was somewhat surprising to the Facilitator and me upon review of the data, since no teacher participated in an observation of another teacher who was more than three grade levels from his/her own teaching assignment. We strongly believe that most teachers can pick up something on which to reflect in any grade level, no matter how far from one’s own, and the results from this question prove that to be true in BSD32.

Table 2

Statement 2: The Demonstration Classroom experience met my individual learning needs more effectively than a traditional professional development session that relies on presentation.

Not at all	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Total Responses	Average Rating
2.78%	0.00%	41.67%	55.56%	36	3.50

97.23% of respondents somewhat or completely agreed that the Demonstration Classroom experience met their individual learning needs more than a traditional workshop or conference. The average rating for this response was 3.5 out of 4.0, at the lower threshold for our team to consider as evidence of the Demonstration Classroom being “highly effective” in meeting individual learning needs. The Demonstration Classroom experience is set up for personalized learning in several ways—first, each observer brings an individualized learning goal for the day; second, the observers can ask specific questions to the host teacher after the lesson, allowing for deeper understanding of certain topics; and third, the observers immediately apply the learning to their own setting. These components are implemented to tailor the learning to each participants’ needs, and it is gratifying to see that survey respondents tend to agree, at least in part, that it works. One teacher commented, “Seeing teaching in action is always better than just hearing about it.” Others explained that the opportunity to discuss the lesson before and after the observation allowed for more personalized learning to occur. Three teachers commented that they were able to more easily tweak the teaching strategies to fit the needs of their students or teaching style after having seen it firsthand, indicating that their individual learning needs were met as well.

One teacher expressed reservation in comparing the Demonstration Classroom to other forms of professional development, such as presentations. "...It's not necessarily comparing apples to apples. I've been to some amazing presentations. The key is going to a presentation that applies to my teaching." I believe that the difficulty comparing two different forms of professional development was the reason several teachers (15/36) responded "somewhat agree" rather than "completely agree." This teacher also touches on a very important element of effective professional development highlighted in the review of research by Darling-Hammond et al., the need for the learning experience to be directly related to the participant's teaching assignment or role (2011, p. 9).

Table 3

Statement 3: The Demonstration Classroom experience provided me with resources (materials, strategies, and/or colleagues) that I could use in the future if I have questions about District 32 initiatives.

Not at all	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Total Responses	Average Rating
2.78%	0.00%	30.56%	66.67%	36	3.61

Arguably one of the essential goals of the Demonstration Classroom experience is to ensure that teachers in BSD32 have resources within the district that they need to carry out the district's high-priority initiatives effectively. It was satisfying to those who developed the program to see that more than 97% of teachers surveyed agreed that the Demonstration Classroom experience provided them with resources to consult if they had questions about the district's initiatives. The average rating for this response was 3.61 out of 4.0, making it within the range for the professional learning experience to be "highly effective" in meeting this goal. Because each of the Demonstration Classroom lessons

was developed around one of the district’s initiatives (differentiation, implementing the new standards, use of formative and summative assessment in instruction, etc.), teachers who attend these sessions were given sample lesson plans, new teaching strategies and tools, and colleagues with whom to consult. Survey comments indicate a high level of satisfaction with access to resources. For example, one teacher remarked, “(to) this day, I use what I observed in my everyday teaching.” I speculate that the one teacher who marked “not at all” for this question was probably a teacher who did not feel the learning was connected to his/her own teaching assignment. If teachers perceive the observation to be too different from the work they do on a daily basis, it would make sense that they might not feel they have been given resources to assist in implementing the district’s initiatives.

Table 4

Statement 4: The Demonstration Classroom experience was connected to my daily work with students.

Not at all	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Total Responses	Average Rating
0.00%	2.86%	14.29%	82.86%	35	3.80

Because the literature on professional development for teachers concludes that it should be connected to practice in order to be most effective (Darling-Hammond et al, 2009; Easton, 2005; Little, 2006), it was important to determine if teachers who participated in Demonstration Classrooms found the experience to be related to their daily work. Of the 35 respondents, 34 somewhat or completely agreed with the statement, while only one teacher answered “somewhat disagree.” This statement earned the highest average rating of 3.8 out of 4.0. It is not surprising since the lessons are

developed by and for teachers in BSD32 and are based around initiatives that are required throughout the district. One teacher responded, “I was able to bring back ideas and immediately start trying new, effective strategies with my students.” Another commented, “Close reads and TDQs (text-dependent questions) are things I do daily in my classroom. This (experience) really helped me as I formed my lessons.”

Table 5

Statement 5: The Demonstration Classroom experience increased my collaboration with colleagues over time.

Not at all	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Total Responses	Average Rating
2.78%	13.89%	33.33%	50.00%	36	3.31

Collaboration is a key element of highly effective professional learning in school. According to Leana, “when the relationships among teachers in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interactions... student achievement scores improve” (2011, p. 33). Collaboration plays a primary role in the Demonstration Classroom experience in that a group of teachers come together to observe and discuss a lesson together. The group learns with and from each other. This statement was developed in order to determine if the collaboration is sustained over time. 83.33% of respondents agreed that the experience increased their collaboration over time, earning the lowest average rating, 3.31 out of 4.0, of the entire survey. By the pre-determined standards of desirability, a rating between 3.0 and 3.5 indicate that the Demonstration Classroom is only partially effective in meeting this goal.

Positive comments indicated that teachers mostly collaborated with their grade level or department team to implement new strategies learned in the Demonstration

Classroom. Negative comments suggested that the experience did not lend itself to forming lasting relationships with colleagues from the observation who work in other buildings. One teacher commented, “The people who I observed and worked with are not in my building. They are not people I see or work with on a daily basis, so I have not collaborated with them.” Another teacher explained that the collaboration was short-lived: “I have emailed teachers...but a dialogue has not been continuous.”

This information indicates that there is little collaboration after the event among the group of teachers who observed the lesson together, but that many teachers take the ideas learned and collaborate with the colleagues with whom they work closely. I would argue that this does in fact show that the goal of the Demonstration Classroom to increase collaboration has been met, since the intent of the program has not been to increase collaboration between the specific group of observers of any Demonstration Classroom, but only to increase collaboration in a general sense. Most comments from the survey and discussion in the focus group interviews proves that general collaboration was increased after teachers participated in the Demonstration Classroom.

Table 6

Statement 6: Participating in Demonstration Classrooms helped me better understand one or more of the District 32 high-priority initiatives: Creating a responsive learning environment; Designing lessons around essential understandings/standards; Using assessment, both formative and summative, for learning; Differentiating instruction.

Not at all	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Total Responses	Average Rating
0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	83.33%	36	3.83

This statement is similar to Statement 3, which asked teachers how well the Demonstration Classroom provided them with resources to understand the District 32 initiatives. However, this statement asked teachers if their experience with Demonstration Classrooms helped them to better understand an initiative, and the results were extremely positive. This response garnered the highest average rating of the entire survey with a 3.83 out of 4.0. These results were expected since the lessons presented through the Demonstration Classroom are planned around the District’s high-priority initiatives. Teacher comments indicated they were most satisfied by being able to see sample lesson plans and take graphic organizers and other teaching tools that could be adapted to fit their own students’ needs. Darling-Hammond et al. found that, “professional development tends to be more effective when it is an integral part of the larger school reform effort, rather than when activities are isolated, having little to do with other initiatives or changes underway at the school” (2009, p. 10). It appears that this element of effective professional development is adequately addressed through the Demonstration Classroom experience, as determined by teacher perceptions reported on this survey.

Table 7

Statement 7: After implementing the strategies observed in the Demonstration Classroom, I saw positive outcomes from my students.

Not at all	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Total Responses	Average Rating
0.00%	0.00%	23.53%	76.47%	34	3.76

Darling-Hammond et al. assert, “efforts to improve student achievement can succeed only by building the capacity of teachers to improve their instructional practice...” (2009, p. 7). The Demonstration Classroom experience sets out to build

teacher capacity to improve their instruction, which in turn, has an effect on student outcomes. It can be difficult to tell whether teacher professional development has a *direct* impact upon student outcomes, but this statement was developed to gather teacher perceptions on the topic. One hundred percent of respondents agreed that after they applied the instructional strategies they learned in the Demonstration Classroom, their students had positive learning outcomes.

One teacher remarked, “This opportunity changed the way I teach close reads. My students are more engaged now and enjoy close reads much more.” Another teacher commented, “My students showed growth in answering higher level text-dependent questions.” These teacher perceptions are interesting and affirming for the program, and lead to some recommendations discussed in the next section.

Table 8

Statement 8: Having specific learning goals set in advance of the observation helped to make the day meaningful.

Not at all	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Completely agree	Total Responses	Average Rating
0.00%	2.86%	25.71%	71.43%	35	3.69

One element of the Demonstration Classroom experience that makes it stand apart from peer observation or other forms of professional learning in schools is that observers must come to the observation with specific learning goals in mind. Each observer shares his/her goals for the day with the group and the Facilitator comments on elements of the planned lesson that might connect to each person’s goals. The intention of this component in the Demonstration Classroom experience is to personalize the learning for each observer’s individual needs. For instance, one teacher might want to find new

strategies for implementing differentiated centers into his/her classroom, while another teacher is looking for suggestions on how to increase higher-order questioning into a lesson.

Thirty-four of 35 respondents (97.14%) somewhat or completely agreed that the learning goals made the experience more meaningful. The average rating for this response was 3.69 out of 4.0, placing this statement in the “highly effective” category. One teacher commented, “Teachers knew what they wanted to learn and take back to their own practice before observing. No one went in blind.” Though the overall perceptions of these learning goals was positive, some comments showed that observers were not quite satisfied with this element of the experience. For instance, one teacher said, “Sometimes the learning goals that I had did not totally align with what I saw, which then didn’t work for me.” Another mentioned, “While creating these goals did force me to think about why I’d like to participate [in the Demonstration Classroom], the most meaningful piece of the experience was the dialogue both before and after the lesson.” In reviewing the comments about the learning goals, it seems that when the observers know exactly what they will be observing and are able to set learning goals that completely align with the lesson, they get the most meaning out of the day.

Unstructured Questions

Five unstructured, open-ended questions were developed to gather information about the strengths and weaknesses of the Demonstration Classroom experience, to gather suggestions for improvement, and to understand how teachers felt about the required follow-up activity. Comments were analyzed and the most frequent responses are discussed.

Question 1: What are some strengths of the Demonstration Classroom experience?

Thirty-two of the 38 survey respondents shared answers to this open-ended question about the strengths of the experience. There were two strengths present in nearly all responses: the ability to observe an actual lesson and the discussion period before and after the observation. In a study of peer observation and modeling by Hendry and Oliver (2012), these two elements were seen as beneficial to teachers as well. “Combining modeling and teachers’ critical reflection on their experience with subsequent enactive mastery of new strategies may result in the greatest improvement in their practice” (p.8).

The most frequent strength mentioned was the ability to see new strategies in action in a real classroom setting. Some comments include:

- “Seeing the strategy in action helped me visualize it in my own practice.”
- “Being able to see the teacher in action is always the best professional development—it’s a true snapshot of what a classroom is and doesn’t feel fake in any way.”
- “Seeing the lesson being taught instead of just having a fellow teacher explain what they taught [is a strength of the Demonstration Classroom].”

Another strength of the Demonstration Classroom mentioned several times in the comments of the survey was the discussion both before and after the observation. Several teachers explained that the discussion set this experience apart from other forms of professional development. For example, one teacher said, “The opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and discuss instructional challenges enhances the observation.” Another

explained, “The session with the teacher after the lesson was a great opportunity to ask questions about why she chose to do certain things during the lesson.”

Two survey respondents mentioned teacher efficacy and leadership as a strength of the program. One teacher thought that the Demonstration Classroom was a good way to highlight the strengths of and celebrate great teachers in BSD32, while another explained that this experience increased his/her confidence and, “helped me to push my teaching to the next level.” These themes will be discussed in greater detail in the analysis of the focus group interviews and the reflective journal entries.

Question 2: What are some weaknesses of the Demonstration Classroom experience?

Of the 38 teachers who participated in this survey, 30 shared their thoughts about the weaknesses of the program. Eight of those thirty (26.67%) commented that there were no weaknesses to the Demonstration Classroom experience at all. The other 22 teachers described several different weaknesses, including a lack of follow-through after the observation was over, time limitations, and a perception that the lesson was “too perfect” to be replicated. The most prevalent response included concerns about time. Eight teachers mentioned that the limited time for the observation, discussion, or follow-up activity hindered their enjoyment of the experience or their application of the learning to their own setting. In District 32, the Demonstration Classroom experience includes a one-hour observation and 90 minutes of discussion before and after the observation. Several teachers wished they could have more time to discuss and/or plan for the application of learning in their setting that same day.

Another weakness cited multiple times in the survey was the lack of follow-through by the Facilitator. One teacher commented, “A little more support afterwards in

regards to how to actually implement [the strategy] in the classroom would be helpful. It would be nice to have some support in the classroom without having to do a demonstration classroom.” This teacher touched on a weakness that was also shared during the focus group interviews. Teachers who agree after the observation to host a future Demonstration Classroom receive more one-on-one support from the Facilitator than those who preferred not to host. Those teachers who would like additional support without hosting a Demonstration Classroom feel they did not learn as much from the experience as they would have liked.

Question 3: What suggestions do you have that might improve the Demonstration Classroom experience?

This question was included in the survey to allow teachers to identify potential solutions to any problems they experienced while attending the Demonstration Classrooms. Twenty-seven of 38 teachers responded to this question. Seven teachers mentioned that they had no suggestions for improvement. Twenty teachers gave specific suggestions that could be used to improve the program in the future. These suggestions for improvement are as follows:

- Five teachers commented that giving more time for observations or for discussion after the observations would improve the experience.
- Seven respondents mentioned expanding the program by opening it up to more teachers or giving more options for topics demonstrated in the lessons.
- Four teachers thought that changing the required follow-up activity would be beneficial.

- Three teachers wished there had been more follow-up or check-in after the observation was completed.
- One respondent believed the lesson's focus should be more transparent during the sign-up process.

In analyzing the responses, it appears that no major overhauls of the program are necessary and that a few minor changes to the program's structure might benefit participants. Each of these suggestions will be given to the Assistant Superintendent for Learning and the Director of Instructional Services to consider for improvement in the future.

Question 4: How does the required follow-up activity, showing application of the learning in your setting, enhance or detract from the Demonstration Classroom experience?

This question was developed in response to talk around the district by teachers who had not participated in Demonstration Classrooms that the follow-up activity was a detriment to the program. Several teachers told principals in their buildings that they were hesitant to sign up for this experience because they did not want to have to develop a lesson plan showing application of their learning after the observation was over. Twenty-nine of the 38 teachers responded to this question and most of them felt the follow-up activity enhanced the experience overall. Twenty of 29 teachers (68.97%) felt the activity was completely positive. For instance, one teacher mentioned, "I was 'forced' to use what I learned immediately, which made it more meaningful for me. I used it right away and learned how it would work in my own classroom as well as how I would modify it to

meet my students' needs. Without this step, [the Demonstration Classroom] wouldn't have been as effective for me.”

These teachers' comments relate directly to Darling-Hammond et al.'s research on effective teacher professional development. After review of research on professional development in the United States and other countries, they found, “Intensive professional development, *especially when it includes applications of knowledge to teachers' planning and instruction* [emphasis added], has a greater chance of influencing teaching practices and, in turn, leading to gains in student learning (2009, p. 9).

Seven teachers (24.14%) believed the follow-up activity was a negative experience. One teacher explained, “This makes people not want to participate. People feel overwhelmed already, so an extra lesson plan and observation is an unneeded stress.” Two teachers (6.89%) mentioned both positive and negative comments about the requirement, saying it was a beneficial experience for them, but that they have heard others refrain from participating in the program because of the follow-up activity. Concerns with the follow-up activity were reinforced during the focus group interviews below.

Question 5: Please add suggestions for instructional practices to highlight in future Demonstration Classrooms.

This question was developed in order to solicit ideas for upcoming Demonstration Classrooms. During the two years of implementation of the Demonstration Classrooms in BSD32, all but one lesson focused on English Language Arts (ELA) content. The majority of the lessons during the 2013-14 school year were based on lessons of close reads, a district initiative related to the shifts in the Common Core State Standards for

ELA. Seven of 15 responses indicated a preference for mathematics instruction to be a new topic for Demonstration Classrooms. Other suggested topics included: individual reading and writing conferences, writing instruction, differentiation at the middle school level, student-created rubrics, and vocabulary instruction. These suggestions will be given to the Assistant Superintendent for Learning and the Director of Instructional Services to use for future planning of the program.

Summary of Survey Data

Overall, an analysis of the survey results indicated that teachers are overwhelmingly satisfied with the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience. All but one goal of the program obtained an overall rating of 3.5 or higher out of 4.0, indicating that teachers perceive the goals of the program are being met to a high degree. Teachers denoted that the most positive elements of the experience are being able to see new teaching strategies in action and having the opportunity to discuss the observation with the teacher directly afterward. Some areas of concern to teachers were the required follow-up activity, which was at times stressful or overwhelming, as well as the limited subject areas or teaching strategies available for demonstration. In the comment sections, teachers expressed interest in reducing or changing the application of learning requirement as well as expanding the content areas, topics, and teaching strategies offered in the program. This survey shows that teacher perceptions of the Demonstration Classroom are positive and teachers believe they improved their practice, and had a positive impact on student outcomes, as a result of participation.

Focus Group Interviews

After the electronic survey was administered and an initial analysis of the data had been completed, volunteers were recruited to participate in focus group interviews. Nine teachers agreed to participate in two separate sessions. One session consisted of four teachers who had been involved as observers in a Demonstration Classroom and one teacher who had been both an observer and a Demonstration Classroom host teacher. The second interview session included four teachers who had all participated as both observers and host teachers. The teachers who participated in each interview are described below:

Focus Group Interview One:

Michael: Michael is an English as a Second Language Interventionist who works primarily with students in grades 2 and 3. He observed one Demonstration Classroom lesson.

Kimberly: Kimberly is a third grade classroom teacher. She observed one Demonstration Classroom lesson.

Carol: Carol is a third grade classroom teacher. She observed one Demonstration Classroom lesson.

Evelyn: Evelyn teaches fifth grade. She observed one Demonstration Classroom lesson.

Linda: Linda is a second grade bilingual teacher. She observed one Demonstration Classroom lesson and also participated as a host teacher after that observation.

Focus Group Interview Two:

Ann: Ann is a consulting teacher who serves as a peer evaluator and mentor for new teachers in grades 3 – 5. She participated as the host teacher for BSD32’s first Demonstration Classroom and she has subsequently observed a Demonstration Classroom lesson.

Jeannette: Jeannette is a first grade teacher who has participated in Demonstration Classrooms as both an observer and a host teacher.

Kathleen: Kathleen teaches second grade. She observed the first Demonstration Classroom in the district and also participated as a host teacher.

Jackie: Jackie is a gifted/differentiation teacher for students in grades 3 – 5. She participated in Demonstration Classrooms as both an observer and a host teacher.

During the focus group interviews, teachers discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the program and shared their overall perceptions. In addition, I asked clarifying questions about certain comments from the survey in order to gain more detailed information. The qualitative data have been sorted into four themes and are discussed below.

Theme One: The Demonstration Classroom Has a Positive Impact on Teachers’ Instructional Practice.

During the two focus group interviews, all nine teachers explained that their participation in the Demonstration Classroom experience had positively affected their instructional practice. Teachers believed that they had learned new, more effective strategies for teaching that they were able to immediately implement into their classrooms. Not only did teachers say they gained new strategies for teaching content, but they also mentioned that they were able to observe other elements, such as classroom

management or flexible grouping strategies, that were not necessarily the focus of the lesson, but were nonetheless helpful to them in their daily practice. The following comments were shared during focus group interviews:

Linda: When I was actually able to see a close read and observe “Whole Brain Teaching” in action, I could start to do it in my own classroom much better than if I just read or heard about it. It was just easier for me to understand.... Whatever I saw, I took it back to my classroom, even that same day. To this day, I am still doing what I saw in [the first grade teacher’s] Demonstration Classroom.

Carol: I feel like it [the Demonstration Classroom experience] helped me refine those teaching skills and strategies. I was able to reflect on how I had been teaching and then make improvements.

Kathleen: There is so much more that you get out of a Demonstration Classroom than just the lesson that is being done. You see classroom management, how the teacher deals with everything, what is up [on the walls] in their room. There is so much you can take back and make your own than just the procedure of the close read lesson.

Ann: I think I got more intentional in my day-to-day planning as well. If that [kind of detailed lesson planning] is supposed to be the expectation, then I wanted to do it more often in my own lesson planning.

In analyzing the comments and discussion around impact on instructional practice, it is affirming for the program to note that all teachers in both focus groups mentioned specific positive impacts on their instructional practice. It is also interesting that the most positive comments came from those teachers who had participated as

Demonstration Classroom host teachers. This may mean that the biggest impact on instructional practice may come not from observing a lesson, but from planning and executing a Demonstration Classroom lesson.

Theme Two: Teachers Perceive the Demonstration Classroom to Have a Positive Impact on Student Performance.

During each focus group interview, teachers were asked to explain whether they thought their participation in Demonstration Classrooms had any impact on student performance. Again, a slight difference in perception was noted between teachers who had hosted the lessons and those who had participated only as observers. For example, Michael, who had observed one Demonstration lesson, explained:

I can't say that I know the Demonstration Classroom really impacted my students' overall abilities or their academic growth or anything, but it certainly made me a better teacher in some ways. Then the hope is that the kids benefit from it.

Linda, who had observed a Demonstration Classroom and also was a host teacher, shared a slightly different opinion:

Well, for sure, my kids benefitted. They are still benefitting this year because I have grown so much as a teacher after the experience. I know what I'm doing. I know how to help my struggling kids. I am not afraid to challenge them with a hard text or question because I know how to help them through. And all of that is because I watched [a first grade teacher teach a Demonstration lesson] and I worked with [the Demonstration Classroom Facilitator] to plan my own lesson.

This discussion again points to the differences between the impact made on teachers who have observed Demonstration Classroom lessons and those who have

received the individual coaching and have hosted their own Demonstration Classroom. Little (2006) cites the benefits of professional development for teachers when it is focused on the instructional triangle (teacher, student, and content). When professional learning is centered around enhancing teachers' understanding of content, how to deliver it in the most effective way, with an emphasis on students' thinking and understanding, then the professional development is most impactful for teachers and students. Teachers who have been selected as Demonstration Classroom hosts are able to spend time analyzing the instructional triangle in a meaningful way, whereas those who observe do not.

Theme Three: The Demonstration Classroom Has Little Impact on Teacher Collaboration.

Because teacher collaboration had the lowest average rating (3.31 out of 4.0) on the Demonstration Classroom teacher survey, it was essential to delve more deeply into this area during the focus group interviews. In both focus groups, teachers explained that this experience did not have a lasting impact on collaboration. However, most teachers felt that the lack of ongoing collaboration after the Demonstration Classroom was not a detriment to the program. In response to a question posed about collaboration after the Demonstration Classroom experience, the following discussion ensued:

Jackie: There was a lot of discussion between two Brighton Middle School teachers and I for about a month afterwards. One was about a technique that I used and another was about a project that I was doing. But after that, not so much [sic].

Kathleen: People are always saying, “I tried this or that from your lesson.” Or, “I liked how you set up Day One of the close read, so now I’m going to do the same.” Not so much true collaboration, though.

Linda: I also had a little interaction with a teacher at the middle school for a while.... It was a short-lived thing. But, I know I can go back to others from the Demonstration Classroom if I need to in the future.

Michael: We are good across the district at collaboration and sharing. So did the Demonstration Classroom improve that? No, I don’t think so. But it’s good anyhow. If this was a huge district, it might be much different. But this is a small district and we pretty much know each other.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) refer to the kind of collaboration described by these teachers as “contrived collegiality,” where the collaboration is highly regulated and controlled, usually by members of the administration. While contrived collegiality can be a starting point for true collaboration where teachers form trusting and supporting relationships with colleagues, it may also lead to superficial or short-lived relationships (p. 117-119). Comments in both the survey and focus group interviews show that even though ongoing, more meaningful collaboration has not been a result of participation in Demonstration Classrooms, teachers feel comfortable knowing to whom they can go for resources and assistance if necessary. Lack of collaboration has not negatively impacted perceptions of the program, but could be something to suggest for improvement of the program in the future.

Theme Four: Limitations of the Current Structure

During the focus group interviews, each of the nine teachers shared concerns about certain aspects of the Demonstration Classroom experience. Some concerns were expressed about the descriptions of the lessons being too vague during the sign-up process, about the lessons being over-prepared and not authentic enough, and about the required follow-up application of learning.

Sign-up Process.

Teachers believed that the Facilitator should be more specific when describing the various Demonstration lessons from which participants could choose to observe. Over time, the descriptions sent out to staff in the invitations have become more vague, leading the teachers in the focus groups to identify this as a potential deterrent to participation in the program. For instance, during the first year of Demonstration Classrooms in 2012-13, email invitations were sent to teachers indicating the grade level and name of the teacher who would be facilitating the lesson. However, during the 2014-15 school year, the email invitations did not include grade levels or teacher names and instead large bands of grade levels for whom the observation would be beneficial. Teachers shared concerns that the descriptions of the lessons were also less clear than in the past. During the focus group interviews, teachers commented on this change in procedure.

Carol: On the most recent [Demonstration Classroom invitation] email, I didn't see the grade level listed. I think it said something like, "Appropriate for grades 2 – 8," but you didn't know what grade level the lesson would be. Maybe an 8th grade teacher is thinking, "I could go into a 6th grade classroom and learn a lot,"

but then the actual observation is a 2nd or 3rd grade classroom and they [*sic*] wouldn't find it as helpful.

Michael: Yeah, I thought I missed the grade level. Why wouldn't [the Demonstration Classroom Facilitator] want you to know that? What would be the problem with that?

Evelyn: I don't know. That's part of the reason I decided to attend—because it was near my grade level. Not knowing who or what it is will make fewer people want to sign up.

Jeannette: I really prefer to see who is actually doing the lesson. I need to see how to do this for the little ones. I wouldn't want to see someone other than Kindergarten to 2nd grade. If I were to walk into a 5th grade room, I would love to see what they do, but for the sake of my time and everyone else's, it would be less beneficial for me to be there. I'd rather see something that is more applicable to me and what my kids need right now.

These conversations made it clear that the current structure of the sign-up process is less satisfactory to teachers because of the limited information available about the lesson during the sign-up process. The teachers included in both focus groups cited this lack of information to be a deterrent to participation in Demonstration Classrooms. Hendry and Oliver (2012) found similar results in their study of a peer observation program. In their study, teachers who had observed others in settings or content areas that were dissimilar to their own reported less satisfaction in the observations.

Lesson Authenticity.

In some of the comments on the teacher survey, teachers mentioned that the Demonstration Classroom lessons seemed overly rehearsed and inauthentic. This topic was discussed in both focus group interviews. After analyzing these conversations, it appears that observers of classrooms with older students found the student behavior to be out of the ordinary and inauthentic. Observers of students in the younger grades did not find this to be a problem. One conversation about lesson authenticity follows:

Evelyn: You have all these adults observing and the kids are better behaved with more adults [in the room]. I felt like, “Is this a natural lesson? Not at all.” It wouldn’t go nearly as smoothly [without the observers there], because the kids were so prepped.... It would have just been more beneficial for me to see an everyday lesson.

Michael: These people are volunteering to be observed, so of course the kids are going to be prepared! They had probably gone through the process with a different text two or three times, so the kids are going to know the steps better and the lesson will be more organized.

Kimberly: I didn’t see anything that I thought was too prepped. When I went into the second grade class, all of a sudden five kids came into the room and it was chaos! That’s what made it so great—it was so authentic. It didn’t go perfectly. Even after she [the teacher] explained the culminating task five times, there were still kids like, “What am I supposed to do?”

Evelyn: It is nice to see the real flavor. That way I can see how to react to that in my own class and see new ways of handling it in my own room.

These discussions bring up concerns with the structure of the Demonstration Classroom, which is set up to allow four to ten observers in the back of a classroom. Some teachers feel that this large group of observers may lead the host teacher and students to behave unnaturally, lessening the feelings of authenticity during the experience.

Required Application of Learning Activity.

When teachers sign up to participate in the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience, they know that they will be required to show application of their learning in their own setting within a matter of three or four weeks (Dugan, 2012). Results of the teacher survey showed that this activity enhanced the learning experience but also may be a deterrent to participation in the program. Teachers in the two focus group interviews were asked to comment further on their experience with the follow-up activity to determine if it was a beneficial experience. During the first focus group interview, the following discussion about the follow-up application activity occurred:

Kimberly: [Another teacher] and I observed different classrooms, but we did our follow-up lesson together. So that was really nice because we were in our Black and Women's History unit and we took a *Scholastic News* article and we developed a close read with lots of TDQs and great tasks. It was really nice to have the "working together" aspect. If I had to do that on my own, it wouldn't have been nearly as good.

Carol: What you came up with was wonderful. The kids really got a lot out of it.

Researcher: So, when it fits well within your curriculum and you have... a partner, it is really beneficial?

Kimberly: Yes, yes.

Evelyn: I don't remember what subject I did my lesson in, but I do remember that [the Facilitator] came in and observed me. That is a little overwhelming. ... To have her do a little evaluation of me was a bit intimidating. It was fine. It went well. But, it was still a little stressful. I think the after-work is one of the reasons more people don't sign up for the Demonstration Classroom. You want to go and learn new things, but you know you're going to have to develop something new and get observed. Having all the paperwork to do eliminates some participation.

Linda: I agree with what you are saying. I was around some co-workers [who were discussing the invitation to attend a Demonstration Classroom] and they were like, "I would never do it [sign up to attend] because of all the follow-up stuff. I would be too nervous."

In the second focus group interview, the teachers also discussed drawbacks related to the follow-up activity:

Jackie: I think people see it as a kind of threatening experience for some reason and I'm not really sure why. I don't know if it's because of the work you have to do afterwards.

Jeannette: Yes, I think that's what it is. I was just having a discussion with some teachers today...and they were saying it was the follow-up part that stopped them from doing it. But I found it to be the most helpful part.

Ann: But I think that's the growth mindset piece too. Everyone in this room is a reflector and wants to constantly improve. Not everyone is like that. For people

who don't have that personality, to have to turn in a lesson plan and maybe have an observation...could be really scary. People don't always want the spotlight.

Kathleen: Maybe your partner teacher could come in and observe you informally.

You could say, "Hey, this is what I learned in the Demonstration Classroom.

Now, can you take a look and give me some feedback?" That would be helpful and less threatening. I understand the application and accountability piece, but maybe it doesn't have to be as formal.

Teachers in both focus groups mentioned significant concerns with the follow-up application component of the Demonstration Classroom. They also mentioned that though many people view it as a deterrent, it was a beneficial experience for them. Recommendations for improvement of this element of the Demonstration Classroom will be discussed in the next section.

Teacher's Reflective Journal

During a four-week period from October 13, 2014 to November 7, 2014, Janet, a middle school reading specialist, participated as a host for a Demonstration Classroom. She co-taught a lesson with a science teacher, with a focus on using formative assessment to effectively differentiate instruction in a science classroom setting. Janet submitted weekly reflections that centered around four major themes:

- Impact on instructional practice;
- Effect on teacher leadership and efficacy;
- Impact on students;
- Drawbacks of the experience.

Unfortunately, during this period, Janet indicated that she was putting in so much additional work preparing for the Demonstration Classroom that she was unable to make much time for reflection. Because of that, her journal entries during the three weeks of planning and preparation were short. However, plenty of information was gathered from the brief entries to aid in determining the impact of the host teacher's participation in the program. Furthermore, the fact that Janet felt she was unable to give more time to the reflective journal because of the additional tasks on her plate is useful information on its own.

Theme One: The Demonstration Classroom Has a Positive Impact on Instructional Practice.

Janet mentioned many positive effects that her participation in the Demonstration Classroom has had on her instructional practice. She commented that the pressure of having colleagues sign up to observe the lesson pushed her outside of her comfort zone. She felt pressure to give participants something they may have never seen before, and having this high expectation for herself made her work harder to plan an outstanding lesson. Janet explained that she spent a great deal of time researching different instructional methods and looking for curricular materials that would benefit students at all levels in the class. After coming up with many ideas, she and her co-teacher discussed them at length and narrowed down their options before collaborating with the Demonstration Classroom Facilitator. During several days of collaboration, the ideas were finalized and a lesson plan developed. Janet estimates that she spent more than 20 hours researching, planning, collaborating, and developing this 45-minute lesson.

Janet mentioned that the detailed lesson planning and amount of time spent in preparation took quite a bit more time than she had ever imagined, but the benefits were clear. Adding such detail to a lesson plan and taking the time to think out potential student responses allowed the lesson to flow better. Janet explained, “I think a crucial element is the planning and prep work. If tasks are designed with the students in mind and questions are anticipated ahead of time, the learning environment will operate itself.” She mentioned that this extensive planning period would benefit her instructional practice for years to come.

Theme Two: The Demonstration Classroom Has a Positive Effect on Teacher Leadership and Efficacy.

One of the goals of the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience is to give teachers in District 32 more leadership opportunities and to increase their sense of efficacy. While some observers mentioned that the experience increased their efficacy, it became clear through discussion in focus group interviews that the bigger impact to leadership and efficacy is in participating in the Demonstration Classroom as a host teacher. Janet, who, as a reading specialist, already views herself as an instructional leader in the area of literacy around her school, found this opportunity to boost her self-confidence and increase her ability to coach other teachers. For example, Janet worked with her science co-teacher to implement new techniques into her classroom. She stated, “I find that my co-teacher is willing to try new things but doesn’t know what to implement. ...I’m able to guide her toward effective strategies. I’ve found myself using the phrase, ‘I noticed that the students struggle with _____. One thing we could try is _____.’ This phrasing seems to make trying new things less scary [for my co-

teacher]....” Without the Demonstration Classroom experience, Janet may not have been able to assist this science teacher in improving her practice.

Furthermore, Janet explained that she spent the weeks before the Demonstration Classroom teaching new routines and procedures to the students, modeling for the science teacher so she would be able to more easily replicate the new differentiated methods of instruction throughout the year. It is clear that she used this experience to coach her co-teacher in new methods of instruction, which helped to increase her leadership. The last line of Janet’s reflective journal sum up her increased sense of efficacy in a nutshell: “I’m relieved that the Demonstration Classroom is over because of the work and stress, but I think it was the best lesson I’ve taught in my 13 years of teaching.” Janet’s thoughts serve as testimony to the power of this experience.

Theme Three: The Demonstration Classroom Has a Positive Impact on Students.

Janet reflected upon the Demonstration Classroom lesson and found that the impact it had on students was more powerful than she thought. Her final journal entry was made a week after the lesson had been taught and shed light on the impact it made on students. Janet wrote:

It’s been [*sic*] a week later and students are still asking if they can “get into groups again.” ...[T]he biggest pay-off is seeing the students so excited about working in their groups. I think that they have liked the autonomy and the choice with their research topic. It was beneficial for them to discuss and refine their research questions with one another. One thing that stuck with me the most was that students were engaged in conversations with one another that pushed their thinking. At first I thought it was because there were so many adults in the room;

however, they maintained that same level of engagement the next day when they were working on their different tasks [without observers in the room].

It appears that Janet's hard work in planning engaging activities for students at all ability levels impacted students in a positive manner.

Theme Four: Drawbacks of the Experience

In Janet's four journal entries, it was evident that she found many benefits in participating in the experience. However, Janet also described some drawbacks that made the experience less positive. First, the amount of time it took for Janet to plan for this lesson was "overwhelming" and "stressful," in her words. She was unable to provide lengthy reflections on the experience due to the time commitment involved. In addition, Janet mentioned that many of the collaboration sessions between her and the co-teacher, as well as collaborations with the Facilitator led to *too* many good ideas. She explained:

One challenge that I've encountered is the never-ending brainstorming session.

My co-teacher and I continue to discuss new activities, articles, and topics. All of them are good, creative ideas that would appeal to students, but it has been difficult honing in on one lesson that we are going to teach.

The hours spent trying to narrow down the lesson's focus were, in Janet's mind, a detriment to the experience.

Another drawback of the experience mentioned in the journal entries was negative feedback from one of the Demonstration Classroom observers. The day after the Demonstration Classroom was held, one of the observers complained about the amount of work he was now going to be required to put in to replicate the lesson he had observed. Rather than thank Janet for the learning opportunity, he showed displeasure that he might

be held to a similar standard despite having “different kids” and a “different curriculum to teach.” Unfortunately, this experience made Janet question the impact the Demonstration Classroom was going to have on the teachers who had observed and their students. She wrote, “I just can’t help but be disappointed in hearing him complain. I put in all that work to help other teachers learn new strategies and use them in their own classrooms. But if they are complaining about it and won’t even try these things with their students, then what good is the Demonstration Classroom anyway?” To feel that her work would make no impact on another teacher’s instruction was clearly upsetting for Janet.

Hendry and Oliver (2012) also found this negative impact of teacher peer observation in their study. Some participants in a peer observation program at the university level found observations to be stressful and came away with things they would not do or found too difficult to do in their own settings. To combat this negative experience, the researchers suggest ensuring that observers have, “similar students and class sizes and a similar interest in teaching well...” (p.7). Perhaps if the observers of Janet’s lesson had class sizes and subject matter more similar to the lesson presented, the complaint would not have occurred.

Summary of Qualitative Data

Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) assert that school-based coaching of teachers enhances professional learning. Their review of the research suggested that coaching leads to greater impact on instructional practice and may have a more positive effect on student achievement than other forms of professional development, though a direct link between professional learning and student achievement has yet to be determined (p.12).

After reviewing the qualitative data from two focus group interviews and four reflective journal entries, similar results were found in this program evaluation. The most benefits came to those teachers who had participated as Demonstration Classroom host teachers. Teachers who received individualized coaching from the Facilitator to plan and deliver a demonstration lesson identified a greater impact and longer-lasting effects than those teachers who had participated only as observers. These findings are somewhat surprising in that I had expected that the required follow-up activity for all participants to be as effective in improving instructional practice and student outcomes as leading a Demonstration lesson.

Qualitative data from interviews and reflective journal entries confirmed the positive results found in the teacher survey. Every teacher interviewed believed the Demonstration Classroom experience to be a positive and worthwhile experience. Many participants found this experience to be the best professional development opportunity they had participated in during their careers as teachers. Through the interviews and journal entries, many suggestions for improvement were identified and will be discussed in detail in the subsequent section.

SECTION FIVE: JUDGMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this program evaluation was to determine the effectiveness of the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience in meeting its stated goals. The stated goals of the program include four topics that were explored through an electronic survey given to teachers, as well as through focus group interviews and a reflective journal. These areas include: increasing teacher efficacy and leadership; positively impacting instructional practice; improving teacher collaboration; and providing clarification and support for Brighton School District 32 high-priority initiatives. After analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, it is clear that the program is highly effective in meeting these goals, with the exception of increasing teacher collaboration. In that area, the program was found to be adequate but not highly effective.

Judgment

Results of the electronic survey given to teachers were overwhelmingly positive. The 38 teachers who had participated in the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience during 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years and completed the survey indicated that they were satisfied with their experience. To be sure, there were some areas for improvement mentioned in the survey that teachers felt would make the program even more effective; however, when survey responses show positive results rated by more than 90% of participants on every question except for one, it is evident that the program was satisfactory to these respondents. Focus group interviews and the reflective journal

completed by a Demonstration Classroom host teacher confirmed these positive survey results. Each of the four goals will be discussed in greater detail below.

Teacher Leadership and Efficacy

While not addressed in the electronic survey, the issue of teacher efficacy and leadership was explored qualitatively through the focus group interviews and reflective journal. The data indicate that teacher efficacy and leadership were impacted more for teachers who had been Demonstration Classroom host teachers. All teachers who had participated as observers felt that they learned new methods of instruction and felt validated in their own practice as a result of the observations, but only those who had worked closely with the Demonstration Classroom Facilitator to plan and deliver a demonstration lesson mentioned an increase in their own sense of efficacy as a teacher or impact on their view of themselves as leaders within the district.

I had anticipated a greater effect on efficacy and leadership with teachers who had delivered demonstration lessons than those who had only been observers, as the research shows that those who apply their learning to their own practice and work collaboratively with others show a greater impact. For example, Stewart explains that passive learning can only impact teachers minimally, whereas teachers are impacted more as they go through, “cycles of exploration, implementation, and improvement” (2014, p. 31).

Without the follow-up activity of working one-on-one with the Demonstration Classroom Facilitator, the transfer is minimal and the impact on a teachers’ sense of efficacy and instructional leadership is lessened. If impact on teacher efficacy and leadership is a goal for Demonstration Classrooms, then there must be more individualized follow-up for those who participate.

Impact on Instructional Practice

In their study on peer observation at the college level, Kohut, Burnap, and Yon (2007) found that both observers and those observed described positive impact on instructional practice after the experience. Likewise, results of the Demonstration Classroom survey, interviews, and the reflective journal all show that instructional practice was positively impacted. All teachers mentioned learning new strategies, new techniques, or different ways of approaching a lesson that they were able to take back and apply in their own settings immediately. Again, however, the data from the focus group interviews and reflective journal show that teachers who participate as Demonstration Classroom host teachers have the most profound impact on instructional practice. These results were not anticipated, but make sense given the amount of time, preparation, and support these teachers are given before hosting their demonstration lessons. While all participants see improvement in their instructional practice, the coaching provided by the Facilitator seems to be the most beneficial part of the experience.

Impact on Teacher Collaboration

BSD32 values teacher collaboration and provides teachers with many opportunities to come together to discuss student data and outcomes, instructional practice, and lesson planning. The Demonstration Classroom experience is one example of a time where teachers are brought together to discuss instructional practice with colleagues with the intent of improving teacher collaboration. The results of the teacher survey indicate that this goal has not been met to a high degree, with the lowest response rate of 83%. When this issue was discussed in focus group interviews, however, teachers brought up many examples of collaboration brought on by the Demonstration Classroom

experience. One teacher, Michael, summed it up well when he described that in our small district, collaboration is already very strong, so there is no need for the Demonstration Classroom experience to provide additional opportunities for collaboration. A different model for the program may be necessary to meet this goal at a higher level.

Support and Clarity for District 32 High-Priority Initiatives

One of the most important goals of the Demonstration Classroom experience is to provide teachers with support in implementing the District 32 high-priority initiatives. The Demonstration Classroom Facilitator chooses all demonstration lessons by ensuring they cover one or more of the District 32 initiatives. Because of this intentional alignment, I was not surprised that this response had the highest overall rating. Every teacher who responded to this question on the survey agreed that the experience gave them support related to one or more of the initiatives. Additionally, these results were confirmed in the focus group interviews. For example, Jeannette, a first grade teacher who had been both an observer and host teacher, explained, “Seeing the things we are supposed to be doing in our classrooms in the Demonstration Classrooms is great. It’s completely connected to what we are doing in our classrooms.” Because the Demonstration Classroom program was developed to address teachers’ concerns regarding implementing a new curriculum with new standards, the fact that this response was so positive is a tremendous outcome.

Recommendations

Though the results of this program evaluation are very positive, there are several recommendations that could make the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience even better for all involved.

1. The Demonstration Classroom Facilitator should provide more clarity on the grade level and subject matter of the Demonstration Classroom lesson during the sign-up process. This would help potential observers make an informed decision about whether the experience would be beneficial to their daily work.
2. The Demonstration Classroom Facilitator, or another qualified colleague, should provide teachers who participate in the Demonstration Classroom experience and do not want to become host teachers with the opportunity for coaching and individualized follow-up. This recommendation would satisfy the teachers who felt they had little follow-up and were unable to fully implement the recommended teaching strategies or methods. In addition, it may increase the effect on teacher efficacy and leadership to provide more individualized coaching to all teachers who participate in the program.
3. Increase the amount of time given for discussion both before and after the demonstration lesson. Many teachers mentioned that these periods felt rushed and they would have preferred more time to reflect with colleagues.
4. Allow partner teachers or teachers in the same grade level to attend a Demonstration Classroom lesson together and to work on the follow-up application of learning together. This recommendation would satisfy teachers who felt the follow-up activity was too overwhelming to complete on their own. In addition, it would provide an added element for ongoing collaboration after the Demonstration Classroom since the teachers see each other regularly.
5. Survey the teachers who have not signed up for Demonstration Classrooms in order to gain understanding on what is preventing them from attending.

6. Expand the program to include demonstration lessons in other subject areas, like mathematics or writing.
7. Further study on the Demonstration Classroom's impact on student outcomes is recommended. An idea would be to choose a classroom whose teacher has recently attended a Demonstration Classroom and another classroom whose teacher has never attended one. The student outcomes for a specific piece of data that was addressed in the observed lesson could be tracked over the course of the school year to determine if differences occurred.
8. Change the required follow-up activity to allow more choice and flexibility for the participating teacher. Examples include:
 - a. Giving more time for completion of the application lesson.
 - b. Allowing two or more teachers to work together to complete the application lesson.
 - c. Offering more individual support to the teachers even if they are not interested in becoming a Demonstration Classroom host teacher in the future.
 - d. Allowing partner teachers or grade level peers to observe the teacher demonstrating the new skill or technique in action rather than having the Facilitator, who is an evaluator, observe.
 - e. Developing a panel of colleagues who are not BSD32 evaluators to give support and observe teachers with the follow-up lesson.

To be certain, the vast majority of participants in the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience perceived the program to be the best professional

development opportunity in which they had ever participated. As a result of intense study of the program, however, a greater impact on instruction and student outcomes was seen in the host teachers than in observers. It may benefit the teachers of BSD32 to spend more time and resources to give teachers the individual coaching offered by the Facilitator rather than continuing with this program as it has been developed. The question, then, is which is more important: providing more teachers with this experience *or* making a greater impact on fewer participants? This will be a question for the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, and Demonstration Classroom Facilitator to answer.

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Appendix A: Demonstration Classroom Survey

The purpose of this survey is to determine teacher perceptions of their involvement in the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience. Data gathered will be shared with staff and used to improve the program. We would appreciate your honesty in determining how well the program has met the intended goals. Thank you for your time!

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. My home school is:

Brighton Middle School

Jackson Elementary School

Taft Elementary School

2. I teach primarily:

Primary Students (PK – 2)

Intermediate Students (3 – 5)

Middle School Students (6 – 8)

3. I have been a teacher for:

One to four years

Five to ten years

More than ten years

STRUCTURED STATEMENTS

Mark the degree to which you agree with the following statements from “not at all” to “completely agree.” You are welcome to add comments below each response to clarify or explain your perceptions.

4. The Demonstration Classroom experience helped me reflect on ways to enhance my practice.

Not at all Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

Optional Comments:

5. The Demonstration Classroom experience met my individual learning needs more effectively than a traditional professional development session that relies on presentation.

Not at all Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

Optional Comments:

6. The Demonstration Classroom experience provided me with resources (materials, strategies, and/or colleagues) that I could use in the future if I have questions about District 32 initiatives.

Not at all Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

Optional Comments:

7. The Demonstration Classroom experience was connected to my daily work with students.

Not at all Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

Optional Comments:

8. The Demonstration Classroom experience increased my collaboration with colleagues over time.

Not at all Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

Optional Comments:

9. Participating in Demonstration Classrooms helped me better understand one or more of the District 32 high-priority initiatives: Creating a responsive learning environment; Designing lessons around essential understandings/standards; Using assessment, both formative and summative, for learning; Differentiating instruction.

Not at all Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

Optional Comments:

10. After implementing the strategies observed in the Demonstration Classroom, I saw positive outcomes from my students.

Not at all Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

Optional Comments:

11. Having specific learning goals set in advance of the observation helped to make the day meaningful.

Not at all Somewhat Disagree Somewhat Agree Completely Agree

Optional Comments:

UNSTRUCTURED QUESTIONS

12. What are some strengths of the Demonstration Classroom experience?

13. What are some weaknesses of the Demonstration Classroom experience?

14. What suggestions do you have that might improve the Demonstration Classroom program experience?

15. How does the required follow-up activity, showing application of the learning in your setting, enhance or detract from the Demonstration Classroom experience?

16. Please add suggestions for instructional practices to highlight in future Demonstration Classrooms.

Appendix B: Focus Group Interview Questions*

1. In your opinion, what were the strengths of the Demonstration Classroom professional learning experience?
2. What were some drawbacks or negatives you encountered as part of your participation in the program?
3. How is the Demonstration Classroom experience different from other forms of professional development you have engaged in?
4. How has participation in the Demonstration Classroom program impacted your instructional practice?
5. How has participation in the Demonstration Classroom program impacted student performance in your classroom?
6. How has participation in the Demonstration Classroom program impacted your collaboration with other teachers?
7. How has participation in the Demonstration Classroom program impacted your understanding of the District 2 high-priority initiatives?
8. Did you find the classroom observation to be an authentic learning experience?
(Some comments mentioned it was inauthentic and too rehearsed.)

**These questions are used as a guide during focus group interviews. Depending upon the flow of conversation, some questions may be skipped or others added.*