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A Phenomenological Investigation of Professional Development and the Impact on Elementary Principals Instructional Leadership

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A Phenomenological Investigation of Professional Development and the Impact on Elementary Principals’ Instructional Leadership

A Dissertation by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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I can attribute my passion for higher education and success to the values and standards inspired by my Cuban family. My family instilled the value of education, the importance of a strong work ethic, and the appreciation for our freedoms and educational opportunities in the United States of America. I live the American dream. As a second language learner, I accomplished what seemed to be the impossible.

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Ernie, my husband and best friend of over thirty-five years, your endless love and support carried me through my toughest days. You are my hero and I love you always and forever.

And finally my grandchildren, may I serve as a role model and always know your dreams can come true!
ABSTRACT

A Phenomenological Investigation: Professional Development and the Impact on Elementary Principals’ Instructional Leadership

By Isa DeArmas

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological investigation is to identify and describe professional development components that elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley perceive as having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership related to building teachers’ capacity for improving classroom instruction.

Methodology: To investigate the professional development of elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley and the impact on instructional leadership, the study will follow a phenomenological research design that includes a series of interviews. This research design will focus and describe professional development components and the perspectives of elementary school principals with regard to professional development in the area of instructional leadership. The sources used to gather data for this study include interviews, which will be used to examine various models and components of professional development and the perceptions of elementary school principals about professional development in the area of instructional leadership. Through one-on-one interviews with selected elementary school principals, the triangulation of data will support the researcher’s efforts in collecting and maintaining appropriate information. This procedure will allow the researcher to find themes and patterns, and to assist in presenting the beliefs related to elementary school principals’ perceptions of their professional development.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Education’s A Blueprint for Reform, Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, strongly calls for action to “reform our schools and deliver a world-class education” (U.S. Dept. of Ed, 2010, p. 7). The United States Education Act includes the following priorities: (1) College and Career-Ready Students, (2) Great Teachers and Great Leaders in Every School, (3) Equity and Opportunity for All Students, (4) Raise the Bar and Reward Excellence, and (5) Promote Innovation and Continuous Improvement (U. S. Dept. of Ed., 2010, p. 7).

Additionally, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 focuses on “improving teacher and principal effectiveness to ensure that every classroom has a great teacher and every school has a great leader” (U.S. Dept. of Ed., 2010, p. 3).

Presently, elementary school principals face numerous challenges as school leaders. Some of these challenges include principals having the responsibility for effectively leading schools to meet the requirements of the United States Department of Education, and successfully leading schools towards implementation of the Common Core State Standards and 21st Century learning-with minimal resources. Elementary school principals also face new challenges associated with California’s Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) that includes strict guidelines for school leaders in the area of accountability for enhanced educational services (www.cde.org, 2014). Furthermore, elementary school principals are expected to provide effective school leadership to implement the Common Core Standards, use direct instruction, meet the needs of all students, all under the umbrella of increasing student achievement. Finally, elementary school principals are charged with providing a “culture of continuous learning, a culture
of high expectations…and a culture of high excellence” (Morillo-Shone, 2014, p. 35).

Today’s elementary school principals are expected to lead the way and provide ongoing support for their teachers, specifically in the use of direct instruction.

To successfully support elementary school principals in their challenge to meet the demands of 21st Century Learning, the literature reveals further analysis and research on professional development is needed in the area of instructional leadership (Guskey, 2000). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) describe instructional leadership, which includes managing and guiding curriculum and instruction (p.19). Additionally, Fullan (2014) refers to instructional leadership as “leading learning” with the understanding that “principals need to be specifically involved in instruction so that they are knowledgeable about its nature and importance” (p.41). Additional studies in instructional leadership include a focus on direct instruction strategies.

Moreover, researchers report that a critical analysis of elementary school principals’ perceptions of professional development strategies must be analyzed to effectively understand the impact on principals’ leadership capabilities for building teachers’ capacity with direct instruction in the classroom. The literature suggests that a thorough analysis and review of instructional leadership professional development for elementary school principals is needed in order to strengthen principals’ leadership to support teachers in using quality direct instruction (Danielson, 2002, p. 26). Susan McLester (2012) shares, “although best practices in student instruction and learning have evolved dramatically over the past couple of decades, new approaches to educator professional development have lagged behind considerably” (McLester, 2012, p. 1).
Equally as important, principals are expected to lead their teachers to ensure that effective direct instruction teaching strategies are consistently implemented.

**Background**

Twenty-first century learning, understanding and unwrapping the Common Core State Standards, promoting effective instructional strategies, coupled with the demands of managing a school every day, requires school districts to support elementary school principals with ongoing effective professional development in the area of instructional leadership. Additionally, the growing community of second language learners and special education students requires all elementary school principals to be highly skilled and prepared to lead schools successfully toward 21st Century learning with innovative and engaging academic rigor. As stated by Dufour and Marzano (2011), “the more skilled the building principal, the more learning can be expected among students” (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, p. 48). According to the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), “principals and teachers must have access to the essential professional development opportunities they need to fully implement the Common Core and to transition to rigorous standards that strengthen teaching and learning” (NAESP, 2013, p. 3).

Throughout the United States, many school districts pride themselves on building the leadership capacity of principals with various types of professional development. Districts provide professional development at all levels so that principals can stay abreast of current pedagogy, and preserve a common language on leadership skills, instructional strategies, and expertise. Educational experts, such as Dufour and Marzano (2011), believe professional development for principals supports building leadership skills in
instruction, and creates leadership capacity at the sites and district levels. A higher level of professional development in instructional leadership is needed now more than ever, as principals are charged with successfully leading their teachers toward quality direct instruction and effective teaching strategies with a dedicated focus on improving instruction.

To build upon elementary school principals’ instructional leadership skills, and to create new levels of support and expertise for principals, additional studies in principals’ instructional leadership professional development must be examined (Morillo-Shone, 2014). As stated by Morillo-Shone (2014) in the article *Mindsets for Mentoring 21st Century Leaders*, “in a demanding educational landscape, transforming schools entails investing in the professional growth of school leaders” (p. 32). Further, various forms of professional development in the area of instructional leadership include components such as support for elementary school principals’ perceiving themselves as instructional leaders to effectively assist teachers with instruction.

The 21st Century expectations for elementary school principals as instructional leaders are extensive. Haughton and Balli (2014) suggest “the principal’s role as an instructional leader is vital in moving a school community toward making achievement gains” (Haughton & Balli, 2014, p. 30). Beyond the daily requirements of running the school each day, elementary school principals have the responsibility to understand and assist with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, to assist in employing effective standards-based instructional strategies such as direct instruction, and to provide innovative instructional leadership in order to meaningfully increase student achievement.
An extensive overview and review of the literature related to professional development in the area of instructional leadership, and elementary school principals’ perceptions of professional development, reveals significant themes and patterns associated with elementary principals’ instructional leadership capacity. Bennis (1985) argued (as cited in Moua, 2010), “leadership capacity competencies have remained the same; our understanding of what it is and how it works and the ways in which people learn to apply it has shifted” (Moua, 2010, p. 15). Professional development for elementary school principals in the area of instructional leadership, and principals’ perceptions of this professional development, need to be examined to include current information on the effectiveness of instructional leadership development for elementary principals (Morillo-Shone, 2014, p.34).

**Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership, defined by Fullan (2014), includes the responsibility of principals to be “specifically involved in instruction so they are knowledgeable about its nature and importance” (p. 41). The responsibility for instructional leadership includes principals’ knowledge of effective direct instruction, and the performance of instructional practices such as learning walks and instructional rounds. These responsibilities also include “setting high instructional expectations, creating a culture of continuous learning for adults tied to student learning, and actively engaging the community to create shared responsibility for student and school success” (Young, 2004, p. 51).

The literature review on instructional leadership is extensive. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005), “effective school leadership today must combine the traditional school leadership duties such as teacher evaluation, budgeting, scheduling,
and facilities maintenance with a deep involvement with specific aspects of teaching and learning” (U.S. Department of Education, 2005, p. 1). Today’s expectations for instructional leaders can be intimidating. The review of the literature exposes the various expectations for principals to be instructional leaders.

Michael Petrilli (2013), senior writer from educationnext.org, examines the concerns of professional development for principals: “the leader of any organization knows that part of his or her job is to look for better ways to do things and to stay current on trends in his field. We should expect no less from our school leaders” (Petrilli, 2013, para. 4). Petrilli (2013) agrees principals are inundated with information, and in some cases principals “don’t take the time to read journals or blogs, to look for innovations, to talk to colleagues, or to wonder about better ways of doing things. According to Petrilli’s (2013) research, professional development opportunities for principals must be encouraged and made easily accessible to provide them with the tools needed to improve their leadership practice, and in turn support teachers with effective direct instruction strategies.

**Professional Development and Student Achievement**

Evaluating and analyzing the effectiveness of professional development in the area of instructional leadership, and elementary school principals’ perceptions of it, is essential to student achievement. The review of the literature indicates a correlation between principals’ knowledge of instructional leadership and effective instructional leadership practices (Guskey, 2000, p. 75). More studies indicate, “administrator knowledge and practices are also directly influenced by the quality of professional development” (Guskey, 2000, p. 75). Further, Guskey (2000) shares how this research
demonstrates the importance of understanding how principals’ knowledge and practices indirectly influence student achievement in two important ways. Guskey (2000) writes, “The first way includes interactions with teachers, especially through activities such as clinical supervision, coaching, and formative evaluation. The second way involves administrators indirectly affecting student learning through their leadership roles in helping to form school policies regarding school organization, the curriculum, assessment, and so on” (p. 75). The success of schools depends on the professional learning of principals and their abilities to participate in and implement effective instructional leadership strategies, and to ensure their influences are positive toward supporting direct instruction strategies (Barth et al., 2005, p. 158).

**Professional Development for School Principals**

According to the Professional Learning Association (2012), the formal definition of professional development is “a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement.” The Professional Learning Association (2012) also offers an overview of professional learning standards to assist in defining what professional development or professional learning looks like in the educational setting. The association describes professional development as “increasing the effectiveness of professional learning as the leverage point with the greatest potential for strengthening and refining the day-to-day the need for further refinement of professional development for principals, as “today’s principal needs to focus on improving teaching and learning” (Professional Learning association, 2012, p. 24).
The research reveals various professional development opportunities available to principals, which “provide principals with opportunities to learn about classical pedagogical knowledge and current practice” (Robbins & Alvy, 2003, p.184). Robbins and Alvy (2003), further state the importance of “providing staff members with information about current trends and developments in education such as the standards movement, process writing, interdisciplinary curriculum approaches, and authentic assessment” (Robbins & Alvy, 2003, p. 184). These include professional development “equipped with knowledge, understanding, application opportunities, and the chance to analyze and evaluate how these developments affect or fit with ones work” (Robbins & Alvy, 2003, p. 185). The research also suggests that having a variety of professional development available to principals provides opportunities for the “practitioner to distinguish between fleeting fads and sound practices” (Robbins & Alvy, 2003, p.185). As explained by Robbins and Alvy (2003), the professional development opportunities available to principals are extensive.

**Types of Professional Development**

The review of the literature points to various types of professional development available to principals. The different types of professional development include models of professional learning communities, coaching/mentoring, in-services, conferences, and institutes (Lambert 2003). According to Lambert (2003), “professional development includes learning opportunities that can be found in collegial conversations, coaching episodes, shared decisions-making groups, reflective journals, parent forums, or other such occasions (p. 21). Lambert also reminds educators of the importance of continuous learning. “It is important for educators to recognize the connection between our own
learning and that of our colleagues” (Lambert, 2003, p. 21). While the research indicates these models of professional development may appear evident in some school settings, there are inconsistencies in the implementation of the different types of instructional professional development, which creates inadequate training and mentoring opportunities for principals.

**Professional Learning Communities**

The review of the literature consistently reports professional learning communities as a form of professional development for principals (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010, p. 63). As stated by Joyce and Calhoun (2010), this includes the “implementation of organizing groups…as a whole to learn from one another’s repertoires, study student learning, and build their stock of professional tools” (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010, p. 63). The review of the literature also clarifies the different stages of implementation of professional learning communities within principal teams. According to the research, professional learning communities must consist of actual collaboration with a sustained focus on student achievement in order to serve the purpose of continued learning as professionals (Fullan, 2014, p. 66).

**Coaching**

A professional development opportunity in the area of instructional leadership includes building principals’ leadership capacity using the coaching strategy. According to Reeves (2009), the research on coaching (used as professional development) is inconsistent (p. 73). Reeves (2009) describes the discrepancies of the coaching models, which exist in schools. One model includes the “coach” in whom educators “share their feelings and can have a trusted ally,” and the other coaching model focuses exclusively
on “individual and organizational performance” (p. 74). Lambert describes the “inquiry coaching” model as a form of helping to “identify, clarify, and focus a question for inquiry” (p. 23). As stated by Reeves, “effective coaching focuses on changing performance” (p. 75). Employing coaching strategies as part of the professional development program for educators requires principals to have clearly defined goals, which include the individual principal’s willingness to change in their practice and implement new methods.

Shared Leadership

The literature review also points to the increase in academic accountability for all stakeholders in school districts and leads researchers to further studies on professional development for principals. Increasingly, the demands placed upon principals continue to be daunting. Today, principals need to learn how to “share the load” (Barth, 2013, p. 11). As recommended by Barth (2013), additional training for principals in delegating educational responsibilities is needed in order to give administrators time to learn innovative leadership strategies. Barth (2013) also suggests “for a long time, people have realized that the principal alone can’t run something as complex and enormous as a school” (p. 11). It is critically important principals have the necessary professional development in leadership and instructional strategies in order to expand their skills as instructional leaders, and in turn to have the skills to build the leadership capacity of teachers within their school settings (Latham & Wilhelm, 2014). As explained by the authors of Supporting Principals to Create Shared Leadership (2014), “by developing non-traditional teacher leader teams that work with administrators to examine student
work and classroom practices and plan more effective instruction, the district is making students its focus” (Latham & Wilhelm, 2014, p. 22).

**Key Components of Professional Development**

**Quality of Professional Development Design**

Experts in the field of elementary education agree in creating opportunities aligned to the goals and the missions of school districts. Superintendent Douglas M. Gephant of Fremont Unified School District presented ten tips for identifying and selecting instructional leaders (Gephart, 2010 n.d., p.9). One of the tips includes “creating a professional development program with the highest quality training for all administrators that mirrors the criteria and standards sought in principals” (Gephart, n.d., p. 9). The emphasis on creating quality professional development programs to meet the needs of all principals continues to be a difficult challenge for some school districts. Gephant’s (2010) research indicates further analyzing how professional development in instructional leadership can support elementary school principals to effectively become instructional leaders.

**Effectiveness of Professional Development**

In the Educational Administration Quarterly Publication, the author Meredith Honig (2012) describes the importance of school districts’ or central offices’ role in “providing job embedded supports to help principals learn how to strengthen their instructional leadership skills” (Honig, 2012, p. 738). Specifically Honig’s (2012) research asks: “what do district administrators do in their work to strengthen principals’ instructional leadership”(p. 738)? Honig’s research reveals various methods for
supporting principals by suggesting strategies to build the leadership capacity, and suggestions for improving principals’ effectiveness as instructional leaders.

**Access to Professional Development**

In Honig’s research, the focus was to identify “strategies associated with deepening professional practice in authentic work settings (as opposed to, for example, in university classrooms or other pre-service settings)” (p. 735). Honig’s research also described professional development by stating: “instructional leadership represents a set of work practices that principals come to integrate into ongoing work through sustained support for such integration over time; arrangements such as on site coaches and other professional development that takes place in schools as part of principal’s regular day” (p. 737). Honig’s research provides information regarding the need for ongoing instructional leadership support for principals and the need for further analysis of instructional professional development for principals.

**District Support for Professional Development**

Many districts continue their efforts on improving professional development opportunities to support principals’ instructional leadership. According to *Leading for Effective Teaching: Toolkit for Supporting Principal Success* by the Department of Education in Washington, “it is extremely important to reflect on the extent to which a central office has established a culture of service and coherence that will make it possible for principals to serve as instructional leaders” ("Leading for Effective Teaching," n.d., p. 3).
Perceptions of Elementary School Principals Toward Professional Development

While research and literature on the perceptions toward professional development of elementary school principals exist, studies indicate it is important to add to the research to assist in effectively understanding principal’s perceptions toward professional development in the area of instructional leadership (Smith, 2005). Smith’s (2005) dissertation titled “Elementary School Principals’ Perceptions of their Needs for Professional Development in Instructional Leadership,” makes references to elementary school principals’ lack of input regarding professional development. Smith (2005) writes, “research regarding professional development activities to instructional leadership largely has been developed without the direct involvement of elementary school principals in the field” (Smith, 2005, p. 39). The research on the lack of input by principals creates significant difficulties, as the essential needs of principals may not be represented in professional development. Further studies also recommend analyzing principals’ perspectives on professional development and instructional leadership, as well as their effectiveness as instructional leaders. As stated by Morillo-Shone (2014), “when a leader’s level of self-awareness is deep enough to effect personal change, he or she is more capable of adopting a fuller spectrum of leadership skills to improve the school’s effectiveness and achievement” (Morillo-Shone, 2014, p. 35).

21st Century Learning

According to the Framework for 21st Century Learning (2014), 21st Century learning is defined as “teaching and learning that combines a discreet focus on 21st Century student outcomes. 21st Century learning includes blending of specific skills, content knowledge, expertise and literacies with innovative support systems to help
students master the multi-dimensional abilities required of them in the 21st Century and beyond” ("Partnership for 21st Century Skills," 2014, p. 1). The research also indicates the need for school leaders to be prepared for 21st century learning by having “leaders who understand the change process and…that it requires a set direction, development of people, and redesigning of the organization through cultures of learning and evaluation” (Leadership in 21st Century Schools, 2009). The literature review indicates it is critical to the development of elementary school principals’ instructional leadership that school districts create professional development programs for principals to help inspire and support change efforts for 21st century learning. The research further supports the efforts of school districts to move toward new strategies such as “(1) promoting reflection time, (2) promoting listening skills (3) letting colleagues teach one another; (4) building emotional intelligence and (5) teaching mindfulness” (Leadership in 21st Century Schools, 2009).

The Wallace Foundation is dedicated to researching educational leaders’ effective practices along with school improvement efforts (The Wallace Foundation, 2012, p. 2). The Wallace Foundation reports, “in the case of Common Core Standards, the imperative to improve instruction means that principals must understand the standards themselves, they must work with department heads to align curriculum with the standards, and they must marshal school resources to meet those standards” (Syed, 2013, p. 4). The Wallace Foundation has “worked with states and districts to develop best ways to improve school leadership in order to promote better teaching and learning. Improving the often-weak training of principals has been central to that work” (Mitgang, 2012, p. 4).
Statement of the Research Problem

Instructional leadership professional development for 21st Century elementary school principals entails going beyond the necessary training needed to implement effective instructional methods (Kanold 2011). In the foreword to Kanold’s book, *The Five Disciplines of PLC Leaders*, Richard Dufour explains the need for organizations to “identify specific skills essential to effective leadership, and purposefully train to develop those skills (Kanold, 2011, p. viii). Continuous improvement for principals also entails analyzing effective practices in order to assist principals to develop and change as instructional leaders. Kanold (2011) shares “at a minimum a systematic analysis of improvement should occur on a yearly or semester basis at the school site and district levels” (Kanold, 2011, p. 60). Kanold (2011) also explains, “an approach to continuous improvement provides the leader with a systemic process for turning the organizational vision into implemented practice” (Kanold, 2011, p. 61). Furthermore, a recent study on instructional leadership coaching revealed, “learners need to be at the center of contextual learning- not receivers of information and expert advice” (Allison Napolitano, 2013, p. 7). This research describes specific strategies to assist principals to develop as instructional leaders, such as embedded instructional approaches (i.e., instructional rounds and effective lesson feedback to teachers). Further research in the area of instructional professional development to support principals with continuous improvement is critical to the success of a principal’s tenure and leadership development.

Providing effective and meaningful professional development in the area of instructional leadership to elementary school principals must be a priority as our nation moves toward critical thinking teaching strategies and 21st Century learning. (Dufour and
Marzano). Dufour and Marzano, (2011) state “if the fundamental challenge of school improvement is improving professional practice, then strategies based on sanctions and punishment must be replaced with strategies to develop the capacity of educators to become more effective” (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, p. 17). Additionally, school districts need to understand the research on how they can implement professional development in the area of training in instructional leadership for principals, in order to improve principals’ effectiveness as instructional leaders to meet the requirements of 21st Century learning. The literature review on principals’ professional development in the area of instructional leadership for principals reveals the need for further research.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation is to identify and describe professional development components that elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley perceive as having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership related to building teachers’ capacity for improving classroom instruction.

**Research Questions**

The following research questions will be addressed and will guide this study:

1. What models of professional development do Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive as having the most impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve classroom instruction?

2. In what ways, if any, do selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive that certain professional development components
have an impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve instruction?

**Significance of the Study**

As the demands for 21st Century instructional leadership increase, elementary school principals continue to need meaningful and relevant professional development to lead their schools effectively and support effective direct instruction (Haughton & Balli, 2014, p. 28) This study will research various forms of professional development available to elementary school principals, and will explore the impact of this professional development on the principal’s instructional leadership. The significance of this study will also include the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding professional development as it relates to their instructional leadership.

This study will fill the gap in the literature, as further research in professional development for elementary school principals will be examined to include the efficiency of the professional development and its effectiveness for principals as instructional leaders. The study will also add to the literature, which analyzes the perceptions of elementary school principals toward professional development and the impact on principal’s instructional leadership. The impact of principals’ professional development will be seen in their teachers’ use of direct instruction. Additionally, elementary school districts will obtain valuable up-to-date insight and information regarding the professional development of their elementary school principals. The research will also provide school districts with information for effectively preparing elementary principals for 21st Century learning, leadership capacity, and instructional leadership. Furthermore, school district leaders will gain current information on the perceptions of elementary
school principals toward professional development and its effectiveness pertaining to instructional leadership. This study may also provide guidance for improving professional development that seeks to influence the instructional leadership of elementary school principals.

**Definitions**

**Professional Development:** “a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement” (learningforward.org).

**21st Century Learning:** “a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits and character traits that are believed by educators, school reformers, college professors, employers and others to be critically important to success in today’s world, particularly in collegiate programs and modern careers. 21st century skills can be applied in all academic subject areas, and in all educational careers, and civics settings throughout a student’s life” (“21st century skills definition,” 2013).

**Theoretical definitions**

**Collective Capacity:** “Learning and engaging in specific, precise evidence-based, high-yield instructional practices. Learning from others (teachers, literacy coaches, principals) and contributing to their learning” (Fullan, 2010, p. 6).

**Collaboration:** “a team as a group of people working together interdependently to achieve a common goal for which members are held mutually accountable.” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010, p. 36).

**Instructional Leadership:** “the principal actively supports day-to-day instructional activities and programs by modeling behaviors, participating in in-service
training, and consistently giving priority to instructional concerns” (Marzano, Waters, & Mcnulty, 2005, p. 18).

**Operational Definitions**

**Accountability**: “the quality or state of being accountable; especially: an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one’s actions” (Webster, 2014).

**Building Capacity**: A development of the capacity of individuals with a “focus on results…collaborative work within and across schools and districts” (Fullan, 2014, p. 67).

**Direct Instruction**: “an approach to teaching, skills-oriented, and the teaching practices it implies are teacher directed. Cognitive skills are broken down into small units, sequenced, deliberate and taught explicitly” (Carnine, 2013, p. 1).

**Effectiveness**: “the degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result; success” (Webster, 2014).

**Instructional Rounds**: “A valuable tool for school districts to use to enhance teacher’s pedagogical skills and develop a culture of collaboration” (Marzano, 2011, p. 80).

**Learning Walks**: To calibrate effective instructional practices and expand administrator and teacher collaboration with a focus on explicit direct instruction (Rodriguez, 2013).

**Perceptions**: “the way you think about or understand someone or something” (Webster, 2014)
**Professional Learning Community**: “An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 11).

**Professional Development Models**: Various forms of professional development such as conferences and workshops, professional learning communities, coaching, and building capacity.

**Professional Development Components**: Elements found in professional development, which include effectiveness, design, access, and support.

**Delimitations**

The study participants were delimited to elementary school principals from high performing schools within the Santa Clarita Valley. The sample for the study is limited to six - eight participating elementary principals in the Santa Clarita Valley; therefore the results may not be generalized to other geographic areas. These schools have similar demographics. The principals in this research study have participated in various professional development opportunities provided by their corresponding school districts.

**Organization of the Study**

This research study includes five chapters with a bibliography and appendixes. Chapter Two consists of findings in the review of the literature, themes that emerged from theory and the history of the main topics related to instructional leadership and professional development for elementary school principals. Chapter Three explains the methodology used for this study. This chapter includes descriptions of the population, sample, instrumentation, procedures for gathering and analyzing data, and limitations. Chapter Four examines and provides the analysis of the data and associated findings of
this study. Chapter Five discusses the significant findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Given that the quality of school leadership is the second most important factor in student achievement (after the quality of teachers), school districts must create the conditions to systematically support, develop, and retain highly effective leaders” (Aguilar et al., 2011, p. 70)

It is crucial for elementary school principals to receive effective professional development in the area of instructional leadership to successfully lead their schools toward meeting the needs of twenty-first century learners. Educational researchers agree that the principal is second only to teaching among school-related factors in her impact on student learning (Aguilar, Goldwasser, Tank-Crestetto, 2011; Fullan, 2014). The demands and expectations placed upon elementary school principals, as well as the changing requirements for schools, necessitates that principals receive comprehensive professional development in the area of instructional leadership. Improving a principal’s pedagogy in instructional leadership practices, and providing principals with support for the implementation of instructional strategies to successfully lead their schools, becomes an integral component of a principal’s professional development and continued professional learning (Fullan, 2014).

This study will explore types of professional development, available and utilized by elementary school principals that have the greatest impact on their instructional leadership in building teachers’ capacity for improving student learning. Chapter II focuses on the literature devoted to different models of professional development, instructional leadership, and principals’ perceptions of professional development. The literature review is structured into three main sections, and is organized using the research on effective professional development for elementary school principals. The first part of this chapter presents the current literature regarding the theoretical
background of professional development in an educational setting. This section will delve into the various historical professional development components available to elementary school principals. The second section of the chapter discusses the various professional development models available in schools today. Various models of professional development are discussed followed by an analysis regarding their impact on instructional leadership and student achievement. The third section describes the perceptions of principals toward their participation in professional development and its impact on their instructional leadership. This section synthesizes the literature regarding the effect of different models of professional development on the growth of elementary school principals’ instructional leadership, which can lead to improved classroom instruction.

The review of the literature provides the conceptual framework for this study. The goal of this study is to explore the following research questions:

1. What models of professional development do Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive as having the most impact on improving their instructional leadership, thus building teachers’ capacity to improve classroom instruction?

2. In what ways, if any, do selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive that certain professional development components have an impact on improving their instructional leadership, thus building their teachers’ capacity to improve instruction?
Professional Development Defined

Before discussing professional development and its impact on principals’ instructional leadership, it is necessary to clarify the definitions of staff development, professional development, and in-service education. Because these terms are considered alternative expressions of a similar thing, in this study the terms will be used interchangeably to relate to the educational preparedness of elementary school principals. These terms also refer to the professional development discussed in this study, and will serve to distinguish various professional development methods and approaches. Townley and Schmieder-Ramirez (2011) suggest the following definitions: “a workable differentiation is that an in-service education imparts specific skills or knowledge, while staff development promotes ongoing professional growth through a cumulative process” (p. 74). Further, the term professional development is defined in the educational field as “a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement” (learningforward.org, 2014). The Wikipedia definition also distinguishes professional development as an extensive “acquisition of skills and knowledge” ("en.m.wikipedia.org," 2014, p. 1). Professional development includes a multitude of programs and trainings designed to assist educators in the improvement of leadership, instruction, and student achievement. Appropriately planned professional development can contribute effectively to quality leadership in the area of instruction, which may lead to increased student achievement.

Theoretical Background of Professional Development in Schools

During the last several decades, the professional development of elementary school principals has been a fundamental function of local school districts across the
United States (Guskey, 2014). Accountability for student achievement, growing expectations for closing the achievement gap, and the local, state, and federal government requirements, necessitate school districts to facilitate and create various professional learning opportunities for elementary school principals and teachers. School districts have been challenged with providing effective professional development opportunities for principals and teachers in an attempt to meet the state and federal educational requirements, and to increase principals’ knowledge of current pedagogy and instructional strategies. Guskey (2014), a researcher in professional development for educators, and a professor in the College of Education at the University of Kentucky, is a leading expert in research and evaluation of professional development in education. Guskey (2014) states, “professional development for educators has a mixed history…it does not include strong and convincing evidence from these activities and programs implemented in diverse contexts that resulted in better practice and improved student learning” (p. 12). In his recent study, Guskey (2014) found that various forms of professional development were successful in assisting principals and teachers with the implementation of new instructional strategies; however, many professional development programs have not met the desired educational goals. Similarly, educational researchers such as Fullan (2014) and Reeves (2010) affirm the importance of effective professional development to support the efforts of principals’ instructional leadership and its impact on direct instruction and student achievement. Nevertheless, the current professional development available to administrators may not meet the needs of principals as instructional leaders (Fullan, 2014).
Effectiveness of Professional Development

The review of the literature revealed a connection between the effectiveness of professional development found in school and district settings to include a direct relationship to increased student achievement. Many researchers suggest that a principal’s knowledge of current pedagogy and implementation of instructional strategies is strongly related to her success in leading her school toward quality instruction and increased student achievement (Reeves, 2010). The quality and effectiveness of professional development determines how elementary school principals will acquire their instructional knowledge and implementation of instructional leadership strategies. This includes principals’ ability to understand the material presented in the professional development, effectively implement newly learned skills to support teachers, and build their teachers’ instructional capacity in direct instruction to ultimately improve student achievement (Guskey, 2000).

In the educational article *Harnessing the Power of PLCs*, DuFour (2014), describes successful and effective professional development components based on his ongoing research. DuFour (2014) concludes that for professional development to be effective it must be

- ongoing, with sustained, rather than episodic and fragmented, focus;
- collective, rather than individualistic;
- job-embedded, with teachers/principals learning as they engage in their daily work;
- results-oriented, with activities directly linked to higher levels of student learning;
Most effective in schools and districts that function as professional learning communities (p.31).

DuFour’s (2014) research indicates a need to ensure that the professional development of educators, specifically principals, includes a focused collaborative approach connected to student learning. Imbedded in the professional development of principals, as suggested by DuFour’s (2014) research, there must be a systemic approach to leadership strategies in order to increase student achievement.

**Professional Development Components**

Educational researchers also agree professional development for elementary school principals must have specific components to support the effectiveness of implementation of acquired and learned instructional skills. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) share that evaluating professional development to determine its effectiveness can be daunting. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) also provide the following four considerations in determining the effectiveness of professional development:

- quality of the professional development implementation;
- effects on what educators acquire and learn;
- different models of professional development to include individuals, groups, and teams to generate professional growth, and;
- the various models of professional development have different objectives.

These professional development considerations provide a guide and a foundation for school districts to assess the effectiveness of their professional development efforts. The effectiveness of professional development on student achievement can be difficult to
evaluate. The research indicates principals, as well as teachers, have the capacity to effectively implement newly learned material following professional development sessions. It is, however, difficult to determine if the professional development impacts or improves the professional practice of principals and if, in fact, it improves student achievement (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010, Guskey 2000).

Providing effective professional development for school leaders requires school districts to deliver a variety of professional development relevant to current pedagogy and effective direct instructional strategies (Reeves, 2010). Effective professional development is also described by Reeves (2010) as “High-Impact Professional Learning,” which includes the following three essential characteristics:

- a focus on student learning;
- rigorous measurement of adult decisions, and;
- a focus on people and practices, not programs (p. 71).

Effective professional learning in the area of instructional leadership is associated with increased student learning and achievement (Reeves 2010). Professional development also includes strategies, such as analyzing student data, to support the efforts of increased teacher and principal knowledge to improve instruction. Similarly, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) emphasize the importance of planning professional development programs to address specific strategies for successful learning to support principals with their instructional leadership. Effective professional development must include identifying factors and criteria to improve the instructional leadership skills of principals in order to support the instructional needs of students (Marzano et al., 2005).
The review of the literature indicates professional development and its effectiveness is not easily defined nor developed. Many professional development models, while carefully crafted to meet the needs of principals as instructional leaders, do not meet the demands of today’s instructional leadership requirements. Effective professional development does not come without challenges (Reeves, 2010). Many professional development programs include difficulties with meeting the needs of educators, specifically supporting principals as instructional leaders. Determining the effectiveness of professional development can be difficult without measures for increased improvement (Guskey, 2000). Further, Guskey (2000) states, “it requires establishing specific criteria to determine if a particular strategy was used appropriately…because of the difficulties inherent in such work and the time required for training, data collection, and analysis, these quality indicators are typically neglected” (p.23). Determining the effectiveness of professional development involves specific criteria to measure the value and success of principals’ gained knowledge and the successful implementation of instructional leadership strategies.

**Design of Professional Development**

California’s Department of Education summarizes the components necessary for quality professional development. The following are specific criteria that should be met when creating and designing professional development for public schools in California.

Designs for Learning: California Design Elements for High Quality Professional Development include:
• use of student performance and achievement data, including student feedback, teacher observation, and analysis of student work and test scores as part of the process for individual and organizational learning;
• uses a coherent long-term professional development planning process, connected to the school plan that reflects both site-based priorities and individual learning needs;
• provides time for professional learning to occur in a meaningful manner;
• respects and encourages the leadership development of teachers;
• develops, refines, and expands teachers’ pedagogical repertoire, content knowledge and the skill to integrate both;
• provides for and promotes the use of continuous inquiry and reflection;
• provides for collaboration and collegial work, balanced with opportunities for individual learning;
• follows the principles of good teaching and learning, including providing comfortable, respectful environments conducive to adult learning;
• creates broad-based support of professional development from all sectors of the organization and community through reciprocal processes for providing information and soliciting feedback;
• builds in accountability practices and evaluation of professional development to provide a foundation for future planning (Townley & Schmieder-Ramirez, 2011, p.77).

When planning and organizing professional development for elementary principals the review of the literature exposes specific criteria that are consistent and
must be implemented to ensure an effective design is followed. The predominant theme for successful professional development criteria includes reviewing student work and lesson observation data (Reeves, 2005). These criteria, if implemented consistently in professional development opportunities for principals, can provide meaningful learning and build upon principals’ instructional knowledge (Fullan 2014; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). It is important to set clear goals when designing professional development for school administrators (Guskey 2000; Marzano et al., 2005). Setting clear goals supports the efforts for meaningful professional development. As goals are set for professional learning, the focus on instruction can remain a priority (Guskey, 2000).

Similarly, Birman, Desimone, Porter, and Garet, (2000) found three structural features of effective designs for creating professional development. These include:

- **Form**: What type of form does the professional development take: activity, committee, group, individual, workshop, or conference?
- **Duration**: How many hours did participants spend in the activity and over what span of time did the activity take place?
- **Participation**: Did the groups of teachers/principals from the same school, grade level, participate collectively or individually? (p. 3)

These structural features provide guidance for district leaders in creating quality professional development and establish a foundation to support the learning of principals. Additionally, the following critical structural features can be used as part of the criteria for an effective professional development design. These include:

- **Content Focus**: To what degree did the activity focus on improving and deepening teachers/principals content knowledge?
• Active Learning: What opportunities did teachers/principals have to become actively engaged in meaningful analysis of teaching and learning? For example, did they review student work or obtain feedback on their teaching or leadership?

• Coherence: Did the professional development activity encourage continued professional communication among teachers/administrators and incorporate experiences that are consistent with teachers/principals’ goals aligned with state standards and assessments? (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000, p. 28).

The literature on the designs of professional development have common themes, which include a focus on student learning and achievement, along with meaningful activities to encourage and support administrators with professional growth in the area of instructional leadership. Ultimately, the focus on student results is at the center of professional development for elementary school principals. In order for professional development to be effective in meeting the instructional and leadership needs of principals, it must include the components of Content Focus, Active Learning, and Coherence (Birman et al., 2000; Reeves, 2010, Guskey 2000).

The research on the design of professional development further explains the school district’s responsibility to ensure that the professional development needs of principals are met through clearly defined professional development in the area of instructional leadership. Equally, school district leaders must ensure that the professional development meets the design criteria for effective professional learning. The research points out that professional development procedures intended to support elementary
principals must include methods and strategies to reinforce the efforts for effective instructional leadership and quality instruction. Through professional development that is structured to meet the needs of instructional leaders, efforts for increasing student achievement can be accomplished (Guskey, 2000, Marzano et al., 2005).

**Impact of Professional Development on Explicit Direct Instruction**

Experts of professional development in the area of instruction agree that understanding and implementing the elements of explicit direct instruction are critical components of an effective professional development design and program aimed at supporting school leaders. This includes professional development planned to assist principals in effectively understanding the principles of direct instruction so they can support teachers in their delivery of daily lessons.

As defined by Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009), explicit direct instruction is a “strategic collection of instructional practices combined together to design and deliver well-crafted lessons that explicitly teach content, especially grade-level content to all students” (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009, p. 12). The elements of an explicit direct instruction lesson include

- **Learning Objective:** A statement describing what students will be able to do by the end of the lesson. It must match the Independent Practice and be clearly stated to the student.

- ** Activate Prior Knowledge:** Purposefully moving something from long-term memory into students’ working memory, which is connected to the new lesson so they can build upon existing knowledge.
• **Concept Development**: teaching students the concepts contained in the Learning Objective.

• **Skill Development**: teaching students the steps or processes used to execute the skills in the Learning Objective. Teaching students how to do it.

• **Lesson Importance**: Teaching students why the content in the lesson is important for them to learn.

• **Guided practice**: Working problems *with* students at the same time, step-by-step, while checking that they execute each step correctly.

• **Lesson Closure**: Having students work problems or answer questions to prove that they have learned the concepts and skills in the Learning Objective *before* they are given Independent Practice to do by themselves.

• **Independent Practice**: Having students successfully practice exactly what they were just taught (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009, p.13).

Explicit direct instruction is an instructional practice to increase student’s ability to learn new concepts (Fisher and Frey (2009). There are specific instructional strategies that must be evident in quality lessons. These include: modeling, metacognitive awareness, and think-alouds (Fisher & Frey, 2013; Hollingsworth and Ybarra’s 2009). There are critical lesson delivery strategies which teachers must incorporate into daily lessons when teaching concepts. The art of teaching includes ensuring students have a clear model of the new concepts and opportunities for practice, while the teacher checks students’ understanding of the new learned material (Fisher & Frey 2013). The following important elements must be evident in lessons for student mastery of concepts.
- Checking for Understanding: Continually verifying that students are learning while they are being taught.
- Explaining: teaching by telling.
- Modeling: teaching using think-alouds to reveal to students the strategic thinking required to solve a problem, and
- Demonstrating: Teaching using physical objects to clarify the content and to support kinesthetic learning (Holingsworth and Ybarra 2009, p. 13).

The research on explicit direct instruction offers a consistent message, which includes the ability for students to learn, retain, and apply newly learned concepts with the use and consistent implementation of specific lesson criteria (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, Fox, 2014, Hattie, 2012, Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009). Explicit direct instruction must occur in order for students to cognitively understand and apply newly learned concepts. DuFour and Marzano (2011) share in the importance of a “Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum” for all students which is correlated to student’s academic achievement (p. 18). This includes the responsibility of principals to support and guide teachers with the implementation of explicit direct instruction. Principals’ knowledge and application of direct instruction must be solid and reliable. Principals, as instructional leaders, must have the capability to build the instructional capacity of teachers by ensuring effective direct instruction strategies are utilized in daily lessons (Marzano et al., 2005).

The review of the literature reveals elementary school principals have the responsibility to efficiently understand and support the implementation of direct instruction in order to support teachers with their daily classroom instruction. With
professional development designed to meet these requirements, principals are equipped with the instructional strategies needed to support teachers with quality direct instruction. It is essential that direct instruction strategies and components be clearly addressed and instructed during principals’ professional learning. This will increase the knowledge base of elementary school leaders in the area of direct instruction and support the efforts of quality instruction in the classroom setting (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, Fox 2014).

The review of the literature on professional development and direct instruction offers specific criteria necessary for building the professional knowledge of principals. Each component of direct instruction must be clearly understood by elementary principals, as their support for teachers with daily instruction is needed for consistent and quality implementation. Supporting teachers with direct instruction requires principals to be skilled and proficient in the area of lesson design because principals’ have an indirect impact on instruction and student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005, Fox 2014, Hattie 2012).

**Federal Legislation on Professional Development**

To provide a foundation for this research study, an extensive analysis of the United States federal legislation *No Child Left Behind* and *Race to the Top* were reviewed and examined. This includes specific components and criteria such as professional development in the area of instruction. The legislation was established to assist educators to improve the implementation of effective instructional strategies, and to support approaches to increase student achievement across the United States (Townley & Schmieder-Ramirez, 2011). The amendment to section 9101(34) of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, re-authorized by the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*,
describes the responsibility of school districts to provide explicit professional
development to teachers and principals in the area of instruction and strategies to increase
student achievement.

The legislative plans include detailed descriptions of the suggested procedures to
use for quality professional development. The guidelines include assessing the efficiency
of the professional development and its effectiveness in increasing student achievement
(Learning Forward, 2014) (Appendix A). Educators are also responsible for staying
abreast with current pedagogy and instructional strategies to support increased student
learning (Townley and Schmieder-Ramirez 2011). As the requirements for the Common
Core State Standards and direct instruction are implemented, the need for further
professional development in these critical areas must be examined and addressed. The
responsibility of school districts must include supporting the instructional needs of
principals through effective professional development. Although principals make
significant efforts to meet the rigorous goals of Common Core State Standards while
supporting their teachers with direct instruction, principals need and require quality
professional development to support their leadership efforts in the area of direct
instruction (Marzano et al., 2005).

Models of Professional Development

There are numerous models of professional development found in elementary
schools and district settings in which principals consistently participate in order to
improve their instructional leadership. Some examples of different models of professional
development include professional learning communities, coaching/mentoring, in-
services, conferences, and institutes. These models of professional development may
overlap to support specific learning opportunities. The professional development opportunities in which teachers and administrators are required to participate may be available through various resources as part of a school district’s plan of improvement. Other forms of professional development include voluntary attendance by teachers and administrators at numerous workshops and conferences sponsored by accredited organizations that also meet the requirements mandated by No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top (Learning Forward.org, 2014).

Conferences and Workshops

There are a multitude of conferences and workshops available to educators that provide specific topics related to instructional leadership. Conferences and workshops attended by principals may be required by school districts. Elementary school principals may also choose to voluntarily attend such workshops and conferences to improve their practice as instructional leaders. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) make the distinction regarding different types of learning through workshops and conferences. They describe the different types of learning as the Practice of Teaching: Horizontal Transfer and Vertical Transfer of New Learning (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010, p. 100). Horizontal Transfer refers to an “easy transition from a workshop to practice in the workplace” (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010, p. 100). This entails learning something at a conference and immediately implementing the learned information in an individual’s practice. Vertical Transfer “refers to the need for new learning by the practitioner as the new learning is implemented or, in other words, the workshop can start the learning, but what is demonstrated cannot simply be imitated in the workplace” (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010, p.
This form of learning involves the practitioner applying their knowledge in their work setting and implementing the new approaches long after the workshop is completed.

While workshops and conferences primarily serve to deliver new information to principals, most researchers make the case that conferences and workshops can actually be viable forms of professional development if they are organized to help the principal transfer their new learning directly into the classroom setting (Guskey, 2000; Fullan, 2014, Marzano et al., 2005). If principals are exposed to actual instructional demonstrations or modeling of skills and simulated practice, with feedback about performance during attended workshops, they have a better chance of being able to take these skills directly back to their schools and implement them immediately (Guskey 2000). It should be noted, however, that many researchers maintain that the missing piece for workshop and conference attendance is that of collaboration (Fullan 2014, Reeves, 2010). When a principal returns to the site after attending a workshop or conference they need additional support to help them implement their new knowledge and skills (Fullan, 2014).

Fullan (2014) encourages school leaders to ask themselves the following important questions to help them understand the importance of implementing new strategies when returning from a conference or workshop.

- Who tried things out?
- Who supports you?
- Who gives you feedback?
- Who picks you up when you make a mistake?
- Who else can you learn from?
• How you take responsibility for change together? (p. 79).

If principals seek collaborative support from colleagues or are able to engage district resources after attending a conference or workshop, they are more likely to implement these new skills back at their school. Fullan’s (2014) research clearly reinforces the importance of professional learning components and collaboration, which should exist beyond the training learned in workshops and conferences.

Traditional workshops and conferences in education have evolved throughout the years. The research indicates a variety of formats and procedures found in educational conferences and workshops. Such conferences and workshops are consistent with presenting new information in the area of instructional leadership, and support principals with information for immediate implementation. Professional development opportunities offer consistent topics for learning new instructional skills, and many provide principals with the necessary concepts to learn and implement in their daily work as instructional leaders (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). In order to have successful outcomes for school leaders, workshops and conferences must include the process for implementation of specific content, (i.e., direct instruction strategies) with goals and objectives aligned to the subject matter (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010).

Traditionally, workshops and conferences can support the growth of administrators as instructional leaders. However, the actual information gathered from such workshops and conferences, and fidelity to the implementation of the newly acquired material, remains in question. There are differences between the implementation of instructional leadership practices, and its effectiveness as it relates to student achievement (Reeves, 2006). Researchers question whether genuine skills are acquired
from the professional development, and whether the sincere application of newly learned material influences principals in their instructional leadership practices (Reeves 2006). The *Knowing-Doing Gap* as referenced by Reeves (2006), refers to the participants’ lack of implementation of acquired skills to the actual work place. Similarly, Pfeffer and Robert (2000), as noted by Reeves (2006), share the *Knowing-Doing Gap* where implementations of newly acquired instructional skills are not put into practice. It can be concluded by the research that the authentic implementation by principals of newly learned information from conferences and workshops remains in question. as to its effectiveness, consistency, and impact on instruction.

The various models of professional development, including conferences and workshops, distinguish the types of learning that occur in these structures. While conferences and workshops may appear to lack in delivering content specific information, many conferences and workshops offer critical information for participants to gain further knowledge toward the improvement of instruction. Researchers agree that workshops are not necessarily unproductive or don’t deliver effective instructional strategies. Rather, the purpose of workshops should remain to deliver quality training in leadership instructional strategies to improve teaching and student learning (Guskey and Suk Yoon, 2009). Educational experts also agree that the value of conferences and workshops are significant in improving the participants’ knowledge of instructional leadership practices (Joyce & Calhoun 2010, Reeves, 2010). The research points to better understanding the impact of conferences and workshops and their authentic and consistent delivery of instructional strategies to improve student achievement.
Professional Learning Communities.

School districts have participated in professional learning communities for several decades. Professional learning communities consist of collaboration among educators with clear learning goals to improve student achievement. Professional learning community supporters follow the principles proposed by Peter Senge (1990) as essential to the successful implementation of professional learning communities (Kanold, 2011). This model of professional development comprises creating learning environments in schools and districts where a professional culture is established and a systemic approach is followed.

Professional learning communities exist to support the learning of individual educators in a collaborative fashion, such as teams of principals, with a focus on student learning and successful outcomes. Professional learning communities entail working collaboratively in teams with agreed upon common instructional goals, as members hold each other accountable toward the common objective of improving instruction (DuFour et al. 2010).

Experts on professional learning communities indicate that professional learning communities have been in existence for over twenty-five years in many schools and districts. Many schools have adopted the professional learning community model as part of their professional development, and have found working as collaborative teams to be successful in raising student achievement (Reeves, 2006). However, there are inconsistencies with the implementation of professional learning communities as a form of professional development. Professional learning communities have been implemented without the core principle of collaboration, and the term has been used typically without
clear purpose and meaning, and without the focus on instructional goals (DuFour et al., 2010).

The inconsistencies with the implementation of professional learning communities of educators are evident in school districts across the nation. Many educational leaders have implemented the practice of professional learning communities without following the principles required for successful outcomes (Fullan, 2014, Reeves, 2006). However, even with missing elements, professional learning communities have been successful in improving collaboration throughout schools. The effectiveness of professional learning communities as compared to other professional development found in schools depends on the successful initial implementation of the professional learning community. Schmoker (2006) also emphasizes the importance of effective implementation of professional learning communities among educators, especially leaders in education. As professional learning communities are formed in teacher teams, principals are expected to ensure that collaboration and effective practices are incorporated within the professional learning communities. These practices can include reviewing assessment data, and creating lessons that serve to improve student achievement.

Professional learning communities can be identified in numerous forms throughout schools and districts. These include teams of educators learning from one another by studying student work samples, sharing instructional techniques to assist in daily lesson delivery, and in developing their professional practice (Joyce and Calhoun 2010). Researchers similarly urge school leaders to reflect on their involvement and contributions to professional learning communities. Research-based terms describing
professional learning communities include: learning organizations, organizational learning, learning communities, and professional communities for learning, following the principles of collaboration and working in teams to improve instruction (Kanold, 2011, Fullan, 2014). These professional research based terms make reference to collaborative learning environments where teams of educators come together to support one another with effective instructional practices.

Kanold (2011) also offers ten criteria to determine if the organization is a true professional learning community.

- Common core values of the shared vision, rather than forced rules and regulations, dominate decision-making.
- Fidelity of content and substance are favored over trivial and superficial team activities.
- There exists a sense of urgency among all adults regarding improving student achievement and closing gaps.
- Every team and everyone are held accountable to the results of their work.
- There is a high relational and technical competence among the majority of the adults.
- Tensions within the PLC work are balanced by and immersed in high levels of trust among the adults.
- Constructive conflict is expected and embraced as part of the work of the team.
- There is a rhythm of innovation and creativity that brings continued renewal and focused risk taking to the work of the school.
• There is a perpetual disquiet with the status quo and a pursuit to make things better – forever.

• Uplifting leaders enable, enrich, and energize the district, the school, or the program area of their school leadership (p. 187).

Professional learning communities proposed by Kanold (2011) follow these ten criteria in order to develop successfully as a professional learning community. These ten criteria must be evident in a true professional learning community model in order for the goals of the professional learning community to be accomplished successfully. Principals must understand their role as instructional leaders in guiding teachers toward implementing effective instructional practices and improving student achievement (Kanold, 2011, Fullan 2014). Professional learning communities are a long-term process that involves a collaborative effort among instructional leaders. Research also indicates a professional learning community must be a constant professional endeavor to support the implementation of effective instructional leadership practices, to build the quality instruction of the teachers which ultimately improves student achievement (Kanold, 2011).

Coaching

Over the years, coaching as professional development for principals has provided the educational world with various training approaches, and has assisted educators with ongoing support with instructional leadership strategies. Reiss (2007), in her book Leadership Coaching for Educators, Bringing Out the Best in School Administrators, defines coaching as “all about change and supporting people and organizations through change, helping them get from one place to another in their professional and personal
lives” (Reiss, 2007, p. 11). Although coaching has been a part of the educational setting for many years, the research indicates minimal coaching has been provided for instructional leaders, especially in the area of reflecting on instructional leadership. Coaching for leaders includes specific opportunities for principals to expand as instructional leaders in a trusting environment. This involves learning from their individual coaching opportunities, expanding their knowledge as principals, reflecting on their instructional leadership, and implementing newly learned leadership skills.

Coaching as a form of professional development for school leaders also includes reflecting on their leadership skills, such as the ability of working as a team, and receiving valuable feedback to improve as an instructional leader. There are approaches used for coaching which include collaboration skills and reflection techniques. Coaching as a professional development model involves consultation, collaboration, and mentoring. Providing opportunities for individuals to learn from one another by sharing ideas and advice on leadership practices creates a coaching environment conducive to professional learning (Rutherford 2005).

Coaching as professional development involves building individual relationships that foster trust and understanding. The role of the coach is to be a mentor who is able to relate to and support a person in their instructional and professional requirements (Whitworth, Kimsey-House, Kimsey House & Sandahl 2007). Coaching as professional development for principals involves individuals that have trusting relationships with their coaches, and have established rapport in which honest conversations surrounding effective instructional leadership practices can be discussed openly (Whitworth et al., 2007).
Coaching supports individuals with their professional practice, and coaching practices support maintaining the organization’s goals as individuals address their individual goals in the organization (Allison-Napolitano 2013). In order for sustainable change to occur within coaching opportunities, organizations must view leadership coaching as tied to the organization’s goals. For successful coaching opportunities to occur within school settings, it is important for principals to collaborate with other principals and share in their instructional knowledge and effective leadership practices (Robbins and Alvy 2003).

By creating professional working relationships between new and existing principals, an important factor in effective coaching conditions comes to exist (Robbins & Alvy, 2003; Fullan, 2014). The research on leadership coaching reveals the importance of extending a leadership program to instructional leaders who are models of exemplary work and who are willing to share their knowledge of effective leadership practices. This ensures maintaining a positive coaching model as members of the coaching teams share effective leadership instructional practices in a productive environment (Allison-Napolitano, 2013). A leadership coaching model in which the organization’s goals are to transform the organization’s culture into one that gains effective student achievement results provides effective professional development opportunities for instructional leaders. Creating an effective professional learning environment that provides coaching strategies for principals will assist in improving the principals’ leadership strategies and will increase student achievement (Aguilar et al., 2011).
**Instructional Rounds**

Educational experts agree professional development for leaders must include opportunities for leadership practice in actual school settings. This may include learning from colleagues in a school setting through learning walks or instructional rounds. This type of professional development may include principals discussing their instructional leadership practices that are aligned to improve instruction and student achievement in actual learning environments (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel 2009; Marzano et al., 2005, Reeves, 2010). Creating a learning environment where principals can practice their instructional skills with colleagues in a collaborative approach supports a form of professional development that is evident in classrooms today (Joyce and Calhoun, 2010).

The premise of instructional rounds comprises learning and improving leadership practices through observing actual lessons, known as learning laboratories (City et al., 2009). This involves principals’ focusing on direct instruction activities during lesson observations, in an effort to improve teachers and principals’ practice, and ultimately increase student achievement. Instructional rounds may have similar names (learning walks, peer observations, classroom visits, walk-throughs) that have the same outcomes – observations of instructional practice to improve instruction (City et al., 2009).

Instructional rounds as a form of professional development for principals supports the efforts to improve instructional leadership practices, and includes improving principals’ knowledge of direct instruction strategies. Instructional rounds as a form of targeted professional development include specific protocols and fundamentals to assist principals develop and expand their practice as instructional leaders (City et al., 2009). Instructional rounds can include a focus on direct instructional strategies. Principals
concentrate on both specific methods of direct instruction, and on effective approaches to how they can support teachers with the delivery of their instruction (City et al., 2009). Establishing procedures during instructional rounds also creates a focused professional development approach in which participants have collective points of reference as part of the collaboration of team members (City et al., 2009). Instructional rounds allow principals to have honest conversations about the lessons observed, and discussions on the effectiveness of delivering quality instruction to meet the needs of all students.

The research on instructional rounds includes understanding that there are various forms of instructional rounds to support the professional development of principals in the area of instruction. The framework of instructional rounds also embraces targeted structures to improve the knowledge and skills of the participants. Educational experts agree planning instructional rounds allows teams of principals to collaborate and share and discuss the observed elements of direct instruction lessons in a united format (City et al., 2009).

The importance of instructional rounds as a form of professional development involves leaders collaborating as a team on the crucial elements of instruction observed in lessons. Instructional rounds involve the collaboration and discussion among principals on specific lesson fundamentals that are critical for student success (Dufour and Marzano (2011). Instructional rounds also provide opportunities for principals to focus on leadership strategies, which include effective feedback strategies (Roberts, 2012).

**Building Leadership Capacity as a form of Professional Development**

For many years educational researchers have examined theories of building the leadership capacity of elementary school principals at the school and district levels across
the United States. One area of emphasis includes the impact of professional development on the capacity of elementary school principals to lead instruction at their schools (Lambert, 2003, Fullan 2014).

The literature clearly demonstrates that professional development that involves all stakeholders (e.g., principals, teachers, parents and students) can result in sustainable change in instructional leadership at the site, which results in increased student achievement (Lambert, 2003, Reeves, 2010, Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). Various ideas on building the leadership capacity of teachers and principals are found throughout the research. The importance of individuals who take the initiative of implementing novel instructional strategies to support their leadership practices is strongly supported by research (Deal and Peterson 1999). Deal and Peterson express an additional perspective toward professional development. They assert, “staff who cannot wait to hear national speakers or one of their own talk about educational reform, new curriculum possibilities, and innovative instructional techniques, send and model the value of learning new ideas, growing professionally, and seek new ways to serve students” (Deal & Peterson, 1999, p. 67).

Additional research on building leadership capacity has led to the creation of leadership elements which principals are encouraged to follow as part of a professional development model in building their instructional leadership. The Leadership Capacity Matrix (Appendix B) includes fundamentals for instructional leaders to follow. These fundamentals include information and inquiry, program coherence, collaboration, responsibility, reflection, and increasing student achievement (Lambert 2003). A significant form of professional development includes building the capacity of
instructi
tional leaders to understand the relationship between individual and collective 
Professional development intertwined with building capacity includes the following 

elements:

- collegial conversations;
- coaching episodes;
- shared decision-making groups;
- reflective journals, and;
- parent forums or other such occasions (Lambert, 2003, p.21).

The research demonstrates that building leadership capacity supports principals in 
the improvement of instruction. Instructional strategies are at the forefront of collegial 
and reflective conversations, reinforcing and building the instructional ability and 
capacity of principals (Lambert 2003, Fullan 2014). Educational experts also agree that 
one of the functions of professional development is to build the capacity of individuals 
within an organization. Professional development opportunities should allow individuals 
to work and learn within a collaborative setting (Senge et al., 2012, Fullan, 2014). This 
professional development model suggests supporting one another in sharing effective 
instructional practices. The staff development model of building capacity, instead of 
merely transmitting knowledge to educators as individuals, tries to improve the capability 
of the whole school by consistently giving educators a way to learn and work with each 
other (Senge et al., 2012). This model also includes basic principles of building the 
capacity of individuals within an organization as outlined by Senge (2012) et al. These 
principles include the following:
• Looking at the real challenges faced by the school. Every session should be driven by problems that educators are trying to solve right now.

• Action learning at the session and in the follow up. Every staff development design should explicitly recognize that new skills atrophy when there is inadequate follow-through.

• Leadership and community engagement. Teaching is not a one-way process, in which teachers act alone. It is embedded in relationships with students, school system administrators, parents, and community leaders (Senge et al., 2012, p. 397).

The importance of these three principles in building leadership capacity, especially as organizations move toward a collaborative environment, includes individuals learning from one another (Senge et al., 2012). Effective professional development in elementary schools also includes sharing and collaborating on topics of students learning and achievement. Similarly, Townley and Schmieder-Ramirez (2011) and Michael Fullan (1998) emphasize the importance of building the leadership capacity of principals. It is a valuable investment to build the capacity of members of an organization as the instructional knowledge of principals is fostered, and they are encouraged and developed as instructional leaders (Fullan, 1998). The phenomenon of building leadership capacity is referred to as “human capacity,” i.e., a means to better understand the potential of individuals to build their leadership capacity (Fullan, 1998; Townley & Schmieder-Ramirez, 2011, p. 35).

In a more recent study, Fullan (2014) discusses the importance of building the leadership capacity of administrators within school systems. The importance of
developing collaborative efforts of leadership capacity in professional development models is needed today to support the instructional demands of schools. (Fullan, 2014). Building the capacity of leaders will result in achieving the desired instructional results needed in today’s world of Common Core State Standards and accountability. The literature review supports building leadership capacity as a form of professional learning and development for elementary school principals. Building the capacity of principals serves to support the instructional leadership strategies needed to ensure effective instructional practices are implemented (DuFour, 2014). Building the leadership capacity in teams of principals will support individual principals with effective and innovative leadership practices, and ensure positive results with teachers’ instructional effectiveness and increased student achievement (DuFour, 2014, Fullan, 2014).

In summary, the research points to various models of professional development that build the leadership capacity of principals. Using a structured form of collaborative professional development to enhance the instructional leadership knowledge of principals can potentially ensure that effective instruction is evident in classrooms on a consistent basis (Fullan, 2014).

**Improvement of Instruction**

The improvement of instruction contains three elements: a common curriculum, sound lessons, and authentic literacy (Schmoker, 2011). Additionally, the research on improvement of instruction includes understanding the Common Core State Standards and their appropriate instructional implementation. The rigorous demands of the Common Core State Standards require explicit instruction in the areas of language arts and math (Fullan, 2014). Providing students with opportunities to not only recall
information, but to conceptually understand, reflect, and apply their knowledge of newly learned concepts and skills, requires educators to go beyond the current methods of teaching (Fullan, 2014, Schmoker, 2011, Fox 2014). This includes collaborative school environments where students extend their learning and contribute, in an innovative fashion, with powerful instructional outcomes. The research also concludes that improving instruction is an indirect responsibility of the principal as the instructional leader. Principals are held accountable to support teachers with direct instructional strategies to ensure students master the Common Core State Standards’ concepts, and have the ability to apply their knowledge in real world situations (Fullan 2014; Hattie, 2012; Schmoker 2011).

**Professional Development in Direct Instruction**

Professional development for principals in the area of explicit direct instruction will support principals as instructional leaders. The professional development of principals will assist teachers with the implementation of explicit direct instruction. Multiple research studies indicate that a direct instruction approach is effective in meeting the learning needs of students, specifically when studying new concepts (Hattie, 2012; Hollingsworth and Ybarra, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005). The research also indicates that principals indirectly influence instruction by supporting their teachers in the implementation of effective direct instruction strategies (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, Hattie 2012).

Professional development in the area of direct instruction is critical for the improvement of overall instruction. Principals need strategies that will support teachers in their delivery of instruction. The importance of targeted professional development for
elementary principals, in the area of direct instruction strategies to specifically strengthen the delivery of instruction, is essential for the achievement of all students (Elmore 2000). Professional development, direct instruction, and its impact on student achievement are imbedded in the review of the literature, which includes multiple perspectives on its effectiveness and its influence on instructional leadership and student results. The impact of professional development in the area of direct instruction is powerful for the improvement of instruction and instructional leadership (Senge et al., 2012). Inadequate professional development, where the connections to what is presented at trainings are not commensurate with what needs to be discussed, will impact the development of principals as instructional leaders. These professional development practices will not allow educators to meet the demands of today’s instructional leadership to produce effective student outcomes (Fullan, 2014, Reeves, 2010). In fact, various forms of professional development exist that do not include learning goals specifically in direct instruction strategies, and thus do not support the professional learning of principals as instructional leaders (Fullan 2014).

Ensuring adequate and acceptable professional development in the area of instructional approaches such as direct instruction strategies includes acknowledging what principals already know, and build upon their knowledge to support new instructional strategies (Senge, 2012). The following important questions developed by Senge (2012) ask educators to reflect when they are organizing and planning professional development focused on improvement of instruction.
• What are our beliefs about how children learn? What do we know about the ways in which performance is linked to both nature and nurture? What leads us to those conclusions, and what observable data can we point to?

• What skills and knowledge will students need to thrive in a society that is both technologically advanced and highly diverse?

• How is the material best taught? If we could do anything to educate kids well, what would we do?

• How is the staff development best supported organizationally? How does our thinking on this differ? And what will we do when we leave this session? (p. 401).

These critical questions provide educators a reference point for developing professional development in the area of direct instructional strategies. These thoughtful questions also support the efforts of a collaborative approach in professional development as district leaders work together to ensure that the professional development of principals includes strategies to support the instructional leadership practices needed for principals today.

**Impact of Professional Development on Instructional Leadership**

The importance of professional development is critical to the development of principals as instructional leaders (Reeves, 2006). Research in the area of instructional leadership for principals indicates professional development must be founded on researched-based professional practice and strategies to assist in the development of leadership. (Guskey, 2006; Reeves, 2006). Professional development must emphasize essential approaches, such as direct instruction strategies, to support quality leadership
practices (Guskey, 2000; Reeves, 2010). The focus of professional development should provide opportunities for a review of student achievement data that is relevant to the improvement of instruction (Guskey, 2000, Marzano et al., 2005). It is also recommended by the Charter Management Organizations, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, that the professional development of principals is continuously improved in an effort to increase direct instruction strategies and improve student achievement. This includes efforts to improve the instructional leadership of principals (Leading for Effective Teaching, n.d.).

**Instructional Leadership**

Studies on professional development further suggest understanding the important characteristics of instructional leadership for principals. This includes helping principals differentiate between manager duties and instructional leadership practices. The concept of instructional leadership is not clearly defined however. Smith and Andrews (1989), as cited in Marzano et al., 2005, describe instructional leadership as having four dimensions. These include: resource provider, instructional resource, communicator, and visible presence (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 18). Smith and Andrews (1989) further explain:

As a resource provider the principal ensures that teachers have the materials, facilities, and budget necessary to adequately perform their duties. As an instructional resource the principal actively supports the day-to-day instructional activities and programs by modeling desired behaviors, participating in in-service training, and consistently giving priority to instructional concerns. As a communicator the principal must have clear goals for the school, and be able to articulate those goals to faculty and staff. As a visible presence the principal
engages in frequent classroom observations and is highly accessible to faculty and staff (p. 18).

The importance of ensuring instructional goals are at the forefront of school improvement is critical to instructional leadership. Educational expectations and objectives must include a clear message with common goals in the area of instructional leadership (Danielson, 2002). Some researchers refer to instructional leadership as “curriculum leadership,” and emphasize in their definition of curriculum leadership the importance of the increasing student achievement by providing valuable professional development for school leaders with purposeful instructional goals (Glatthorn & Jailall, 2009, p. 37). The research on instructional leadership points to a focus on a direct instruction model with clear expectations and goals on improved instruction. Instructional leadership also encompasses effective leadership skills so as to support the classroom teachers’ daily instruction and build the instructional capacity of teachers (Marzano et al., 2005, Fullan, 2014).

The Center for Educational Leadership’s Professional Development model from the University of Washington’s College of Education also shares perspectives on instructional leadership (Silverman & Honig, 2013). The professional development model entails continued support for instructional leaders so that they may assist teachers with the delivery of effective and valuable instructional strategies to improve student achievement (Silverman & Honig, 2013). The model also serves to support principals in transforming their leadership skills to become effective instructional leaders, because instructional leadership is multifaceted and necessitates a process of development (Silverman & Honig, 2013). The focus on direct instructional leadership practices such as
lesson feedback, instructional rounds, and instructional strategies assist in improving instruction. Furthermore, the study suggests school districts should work toward determining a collaborative definition of instructional leadership, with common instructional goals (Silverman & Honig, 2013). Providing principals with professional development in the area of instructional strategies is critical to assisting teachers with direct instruction implementation and increasing student learning (Young, 2004).

As evidenced by the literature on instructional leadership, there is a growing interest in instructional leadership and a developing need for it. As the literature points to an increased focus on instructional leadership in the area of direct instruction, few research studies have been done on the actual professional development of instructional leadership. After an extensive search through peer review databases, the researcher found studies by Fisher and Frey (2012) and Marzano et al., (2005) that yielded results on the need for further professional development in the area of instructional leadership approaches including direct instruction strategies. Fisher and Frey (2008) focused their research on lesson design (direct instruction strategies) and the importance of guided instruction. Marzano et al., (2005) completed a theory-based meta-analysis on direct instruction strategies and their impact on student achievement. Both studies include dimensions on the impact of instructional leadership and the role of the principal in building the capacity of teachers’ direct instruction strategies (Marzano et al., 2005). However, there is an urgent need for further studies on professional development in the area of instructional leadership for principals as it relates to direct instruction strategies.

A focus on professional development in the area of instructional leadership includes essential elements such as direct instruction strategies (Reeves, 2010, Marzano
et al., 2005). The importance of focusing professional development on effective direct instruction strategies is critical to the improvement of instruction, as opposed to random professional development workshops that do not have specific criteria such as direct instruction strategies (Reeves 2010, Marzano et al., 2005). Similar ideas based on the research on effective schools include professional development in direct instruction strategies. (Marzano et al., 2005). The highest form of effective leadership includes professional development opportunities with targeted development in direct instruction strategies (Marzano et al., 2005).

The research on instructional leadership is connected to direct instruction and student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). Principals are expected to be knowledgeable in direct instructional strategies in order to support teachers in their delivery of effective instruction. Clear and consistent direct instructional strategies are aligned to effective instruction. Components of direct instruction include understanding lesson elements such as measurable objectives, with a focus on monitoring students’ involvement with the newly learned material (Marzano et al., 2005; Hattie, 2012). The research in DuFour and Marzano’s (2011) studies indicates that principals impact student achievement by supporting and building the capacity of teachers to deliver effective instruction. Dufour and Marzano (2011) agree that the “principal affects teachers, who in turn have a direct influence on student achievement” (Dufour & Marzano, 2011, p. 49). Researches also specifies the critical importance of the principal’s ability to understand direct instruction and consistently support teachers’ instructional abilities and their implementation of effective instructional strategies (Marzano et al., 2005).
Perceptions of Principals Toward Professional Development

Although there are marked efforts toward improving and understanding principal professional development, the research indicates there are insufficient studies analyzing the perspectives of educators with professional development in the area of instructional leadership (Grissom and Harrington, 2010). The literature regarding the perceptions of principals toward professional development in schools and districts is wide and diverse. Principals are adamant about their professional development experiences; however, they rarely contribute their ideas to the creation of professional development that would meet their needs as instructional leaders. Principals understand there is a need for professional development that is consistent in the area of instructional leadership. However, the research indicates that principals may not be able to express their perspectives of what is needed in professional development to meet their needs as instructional leaders (Magnusson, 2011).

Effective professional development is important for principals to lead their school successfully. However, at times the needs of principals as instructional leaders are disregarded and not incorporated in on-going professional development (Bartoletti, 2014). Principal leadership is critical to the success of student achievement. Therefore, the perceptions of principals need to be taken into consideration when creating professional development opportunities for them (Bartoletti, 2014). The perceptions of principals in the area of instruction are not necessarily utilized for the improvement of professional development. Professional development should be guided by the instructional needs of principals, and their collaborative requirements to improve their leadership capacity (Guskey & Suk Yoon, 2009).
The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) has compared the professional
development of principals and their perceptions of it. This research team interviewed
Thomas R. Guskey (2006) to gain further knowledge on the impact of professional
development in schools, and the perceptions of principals toward professional
development. During this interview, Guskey (2006), made reference to understanding the
perspectives of educators on professional development. This includes understanding the
different principal perspectives that are focused on specific efforts to improve instruction.
Principals’ professional development must have a positive impact on principals’
knowledge as instructional leaders for it to be considered a valuable learning experience
(Guskey 2006). The Harvard Family Research Project (2006) found elementary school
principals across schools in the United States who, throughout their tenure as
administrators, participated in different models of professional development to assist in
their roles as instructional leaders. However, principals’ individual or collective
perspectives were not necessarily taken into account as the professional development
efforts were organized.

The perspectives on the effectiveness of professional development experiences
differ among elementary school principals. The research indicates there is a critical
impact on principals’ involvement with the development of professional development;
however, principals’ perspectives are not necessarily taken into consideration (Guskey,
2006). The review of the literature on professional development points to varying ideas
on the perspectives of principals toward professional development as it relates to
instructional leadership.
Conceptual Framework

The review of the literature regarding elementary principal professional development was wide and diverse. A frame of reference was needed to organize examples from the literature to align with the stated research questions. After an extensive search of the literature, the researcher selected two distinct concepts that appeared central to the sources and descriptions of professional development. These two concepts are described throughout chapter II and include: (1) professional development models and (2) professional development components. The researcher developed categories within each main area and named specific examples cited throughout the literature. The conceptual framework enabled the researcher to design the interview instrument to address the two research questions.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Models</th>
<th>Impact For Improving Principals’ Instructional Leadership</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conferences/Workshops</td>
<td>New concepts presented</td>
<td>Reeves, (2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Quality of training</td>
<td>Guskey, (2000)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Direct Service Model</td>
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<td>Professional Learning Communities</td>
<td>Teams of educators</td>
<td>Senge, (1990)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Kanold, (2011)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Focus on instruction</td>
<td>Fullan, (2014)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Focus on researched based strategies (Direct Instruction)</td>
<td>Marzano et al., (2005)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>DuFour et al., (2010)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>Support for individual principals</td>
<td>Reiss, (2007)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trusting environment</td>
<td>Rutherford, (2005)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td>Allison-Napolitano, (2013)</td>
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Table 1

**Conceptual Framework (continued)**

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<th>Professional Development Models</th>
<th>Impact For Improving Principals' Instructional Leadership</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improvement of instruction</td>
<td>City et al., (2009)</td>
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<td>Marzano et al., (2005)</td>
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<td>Building Leadership Capacity</td>
<td>Collegial conversations</td>
<td>Fullan, (2014)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Shared decision making</td>
<td>City et al., (2009)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Professional practice of skills</td>
<td>Reeves, (2006)</td>
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<td>Marzano et al., (2005)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Professional Development Components</th>
<th>Factors Impacting Principals Instructional Leadership</th>
<th>Literature Review</th>
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<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Guskey, (2000)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Effect on what educators acquire and learn</td>
<td>Fullan, (2014)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Various models to include individual, group and teams</td>
<td>Marzano et al., (2005)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Focus on student learning</td>
<td>Reeves, (2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Focus on people and practices</td>
<td>DuFour et al., (2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Relevance to instructional leadership</td>
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<td>Design</td>
<td>Use of student performance data</td>
<td>Reeves, (2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Focus on Direct Instruction components</td>
<td>Marzano et al., (2005)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Goal oriented</td>
<td>Fullan, (2014)</td>
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<td>Aligned with district strategic plan</td>
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<td>Principal buy in</td>
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<td>Principal input into design</td>
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<td>Access</td>
<td>Consistency of professional development</td>
<td>Reeves, (2010)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>Fullan, (2014)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Commensurate with principal’s current instructional leadership ability</td>
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<td>Comprehensive needs</td>
<td>Reeves, (2010)</td>
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<td>Prioritization of goals</td>
<td>Marzano et al., (2005)</td>
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<td>Monitoring</td>
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<td>Ongoing support</td>
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Conclusion

It can be concluded from the review of the literature that the principal has an indirect impact on effecting quality instruction to improve student achievement (Hattie, 2012; Fox, 2014). Professional development impacts the instructional leadership capabilities of elementary school principals as instructional leaders. The degree to which professional development impacts principals’ instructional leadership depends on the quality of the professional development and the implementation of newly learned material (Guskey, 2000; Marzano et al., 2005).

The various forms of professional development found in school districts range from personalized learning to collaboration among teams of educators. The research reveals that while there are many forms of professional development, targeted professional development in the area of instructional strategies proved to be most successful with increasing student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005; Fullan, 2014).

One significant form of professional development is that of professional learning communities. Information and data on professional learning communities are extensive. Professional learning communities have developed over the years to include models of working as teams through collaboration and trust building. Professional learning communities include an environment conducive to adult learning, which in turn benefits the academic achievement of students. Professional learning communities have been identified by educational researchers as having the greatest impact on individual and group organizational learning, and as productive examples of professional development in the area of improving instruction (Kanold, 2011).
The review of the literature demonstrates that a coaching model is an equally important type of professional development. Understanding the elements of leadership coaching provides a better perspective of coaching used as professional development for school principals (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). A coaching professional development model involves trusting individuals participating in the process of collaboration, and reflecting on instructional leadership strategies. Principals will benefit and improve their practice as instructional leaders, and assist in the improvement of instruction and increase student achievement (Guskey, 2000).

The research on professional development in the area of instructional rounds reinforces the efforts of studying key elements of lessons and instruction in an attempt to improve and facilitate effective instruction. Principals are often called to lead instructional rounds and to provide feedback as a means of support for teachers and improvement of their instruction (City et al., 2009). The research points to the importance of providing instructional rounds as a form of professional development for principals as they lead their teachers with effective direct instruction (City et al., 2009, Marzano et al., 2005).

Consistently throughout the research, the need to build the capacity of principals was a focus in relation to leading professional development (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, 2010). The importance of building the capacity of principals involves actual work within the school setting, which includes the daily instructional duties of principals related to the instructional goals of the district (DuFour et al., 2010). Building the leadership capacity of elementary school principals is important for the improvement of instruction. The research on building the leadership capacity of elementary school
principals defines the importance of effective implementation of instructional practices. As elementary principals turn to district leadership for support, district leaders are expected to provide the resources and tools necessary to assist in developing and building the capacity of principals by effective professional development (DuFour et al., 2010; Marzano et al., 2005).

Professional development for elementary school principals has been fundamental and critical to the improvement of instruction. While the professional development delivery methods vary among schools, the impact of principals’ new learning depends on the immediate implementation of the learning in school settings. There is a significant relationship between the quality of professional development on instructional leadership and the implementation of these practices to improve instruction (Fullan 2014).

The review of the literature reinforces the significant impact of professional development on the improvement of instructional leadership and the elements of explicit direct instruction. Grounded on extensive research-based studies and approaches, explicit direct instruction comprises specific strategies for teaching concepts. Direct instruction strategies and designed to explicitly teach concept were found to be necessary components of a successful professional development program (Hollingsworth and Ybarra, 2009). For over thirty years, the research on direct instruction implemented effectively has proven to have a significant impact on student understanding and mastery of new concepts (Hattie, 2012).

Research has explored understanding the professional knowledge that elementary school principals receive through meaningful professional development. The professional development must include preparation in direct instruction strategies by consistent
collaborative approaches in order to be considered effective professional learning (Fullan, 2014). This high level of professional development is needed today, especially in the era of the Common Core State Standards and the high stakes accountability for student achievement (Hattie, 2012, Fullan, 2014).

The review of the literature also examined the perceptions of principals toward professional development in the area of instructional leadership and its impact on improving instruction. The research indicates a need for further contributions and participation from principals in professional development designed in the area of instruction (Guskey, 2000). Active feedback from principals’ about their instructional leadership needs will increase the effectiveness of their professional development. There are inconsistencies in understanding the perceptions of principals toward professional development and its impact on instructional leadership. Although many school districts survey and consider the perceptions of principals regarding effective professional development, few school leaders find that professional development has an impact on their day-to-day leadership responsibilities in meeting their needs as instructional leaders (Guskey, 2014). The educational research tells us that elementary school principals want to include additional components of instructional leadership in their professional development.
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Chapter III describes the methodology used in this study. This phenomenological investigation focuses on the professional development of elementary school principals in the area of instructional leadership, and attempts to answer the proposed research questions. This phenomenological investigation includes elementary school districts in the Santa Clarita Valley. The phenomenological research is explained in this chapter, including the method and approach used to identify the population and the sample, as well as the instrumentation, data analysis, limitations, and the summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation is to identify and describe professional development components that elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley perceive as having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership related to building teachers’ capacity for improving classroom instruction.

Research Questions

To provide a greater understanding of the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding professional development in the area of instructional leadership, the study will investigate the following research questions.

1. What models of professional development do Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive as having the most impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve classroom instruction?
2. In what ways, if any, do selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive that certain professional development components have an impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve instruction?

**Research Design**

To investigate the professional development of elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley, the study followed a phenomenological research design. The appropriateness of this study includes further understanding the perceptions of elementary school principals with regard to professional development. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a phenomenological study “describes the meanings of lived experience” (p.24). This study will use a non-experimental and descriptive approach. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explain how non-experimental differs from an experimental approach. “Non-experimental research designs describe the phenomena and examine the relationship between different phenomena without any direct manipulation of conditions that are experienced” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 22).

Further, using a phenomenological approach allows the researcher to “describe the achievements, attitudes, behaviors, or other traits of a group or subject”(McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 217). This methodology allowed the researcher to identify and describe the professional development of elementary school principals and their perceptions on the impact of professional development in the area of instructional leadership.

A variety of research methods were carefully considered for this study. Due to the nature of this data, specifically stories from the field, qualitative methods seemed most
appropriate. A phenomenological approach is the appropriate methodology for this research as the investigator was able to describe lived experiences of principals (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To appropriately conduct a phenomenological study, the researcher needed to understand and interpret the participants’ lived experiences thoroughly and objectively in order to interpret the findings accurately. Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals participate in professional development specific to their districts’ instructional goals. Therefore, in order to study this unique phenomenon, a phenomenological study was finally selected as the most appropriate in order to carefully capture and describe the participants’ experiences with professional development. This phenomenological study cannot be easily replicated, as this study is case specific to elementary districts in the Santa Clarita Valley.

The perspectives of the participants are equally important as noted by McMillan and Schumacher (2010). This research design focused and described the perspectives of elementary school principals with regard to professional development in the area of instructional leadership.

**Types of Data**

A strength of a phenomenological study includes in-depth interviews with multiple participants. The sources used to gather data for this study include structured interviews, which will be used to examine the perceptions of elementary school principals about professional development in the area of instructional leadership. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggest that interviews be “personal and in-depth,” and that the researcher will have “several interview sessions with the participant” (p.346). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) “the researcher also needs considerable
skill in listening, prompting when appropriate, and encouraging participants to reflect, expand, and elaborate on their remembrances of the experiences.” According to Patton (2002) “the purpose of interviewing is to allow us (researcher) to enter into the other person’s perspectives and to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather stories” (p. 341). In this study, interviews allowed the researcher to collect data on the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding instructional professional development and their influence on building the capacity of teachers to use direct instruction.

This research studied the professional development available to elementary school principals, and researched the perceptions of elementary school principals toward professional development and its impact and effectiveness on their instructional leadership. Information needed for this research gathered a series of in-depth interview questions. Through various interviews, the data supported the researcher’s efforts in collecting and maintaining appropriate information in order to find themes and patterns, and to assist in presenting the beliefs related to elementary school principals’ perceptions of their professional development.

**Background of the Researcher**

The researcher used her professional insight on participation selection. The researcher is currently a Director of Curriculum and Instruction with twenty-eight years of experience in an elementary school setting. The researcher’s extensive background includes thirteen years as an elementary school principal. The researcher has distinctive knowledge of the California Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, and is well versed on the requirements of instructional leadership and professional development in
the elementary school setting. Furthermore, the researcher, under the direction of her superintendents, has observed and studied direct instruction during hundreds of instructional rounds and learning walks in various elementary school settings. The researcher, as the instructional leader, provides the school district with professional development in the area of direct instruction. To limit the potential biases of the researcher, she included protocols to guide the study. The protocols include a set of guidelines reviewed by an expert committee (superintendents from each of the elementary school districts in the Santa Clarita Valley) to approve the selection of the population sample.

Population

The population for this study encompasses elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley elementary public school districts located in Los Angeles County. Currently there are forty-two elementary school principals working in the Santa Clarita Valley. Although all principals possess knowledge about professional development related to improving instructional leadership, this study focused on those elementary principals who were perceived by their superintendents to have a strong knowledge base about professional development and its impact on building teacher’s capacity with direct instruction. Additionally, the principals selected to participate were those who were known by their superintendent to have successfully utilized various professional development models at their schools to improve instruction. The researcher in this study focused on elementary school principals in school districts in the Santa Clarita Valley as the target population. Principals from the various elementary school districts were nominated by selected Santa Clarita Valley Elementary School District Superintendents.
as potential candidates to participate in this study as the target population. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “a target population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 129). The Santa Clarita Valley was selected due to the researcher’s geographical location and accessibility to local participants. The Santa Clarita Valley is located in Northern Los Angeles County. The elementary school districts were identified using the most recent district directory, which were retrieved from county and district web sites or phone calls to the respective school districts. These county directories list all the schools, superintendents, district grade levels, and contact information for each district.

**Participant Selection**

The proposed population used for this research investigation includes elementary principals from the Santa Clarita Valley school districts. The research study followed purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling “people are selected because they are information rich and illuminative...they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p.40). Purposeful sampling for this research study allowed the researcher to learn and obtain in depth information regarding the professional development of elementary school principals and their perceptions on the impact of their instructional leadership. Using purposeful sampling allows the researcher to “capture and describe central themes” providing the researcher with rich information regarding the phenomenon (Patton, 2002, p.234).

The participation of eight principals in the sample were identified through a nomination process. A letter was sent to Santa Clarita elementary school district
superintendents introducing the researcher who would be calling them personally and explaining the purpose of the research (Appendix C). With approval from the dissertation chairperson and committee members, the researcher contacted the assistant superintendents of each elementary district and asked them to identify potential principals who met the criteria of the study. The researcher asked the assistant superintendents to identify principals who met the criteria listed below. The dissertation chair reviewed and approved principals who:

- are currently serving as principal for an elementary public school in the Santa Clarita Valley;
- have a minimum of three years experience as an elementary school principal;
- actively participate in professional development in an ongoing basis as evident in the school district’s professional development plan;
- consistently implement newly learned leadership strategies evident through observations by superintendents.

A list of nominated elementary principals was generated for potential participation in the study. The researcher met with the dissertation chair to discuss the nominations. From this list a total of six principals who met the criteria were selected. A letter of introduction was sent, via email, to each of the participants. This letter provided information about the researcher, the research topic and criterion required to participate in this study (Appendix D). An email attachment included a Participant Consent form and copy of the research Participant’s Bill of Rights that described the study in more detail including: the purpose, procedures, risks, and confidentiality (Appendix E).
The participants were asked to take part in an audiotaping session of one to two hours. The purpose of audiotaping participants comprises of carefully capturing the responses from the participants (Patton, 2002). It is vital during the data collection phase “to record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee’s perspective” so as to have a complete understanding of the data being collected (Patton, 2002, p. 380). The method of audiotaping provides a vehicle to capture exact information of what has been described by the participant (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Selected elementary school principals willing to share their personal experiences though an audiotaped interview were asked to schedule an interview with a personal call from the researcher to establish an interview time. The confirmed interview time was followed up with a Google Docs invitation via email. Each principal willing to participate voluntarily in the research study obtained an informed consent that was approved by Brandman University’s IRB. Participants for this study were provided with an overview of the research, benefits of the study, and potential harms of the study at an introductory meeting.

All of the information and data gathered by the researcher remained confidential. Participants were allowed to opt out of the study at any time. Additionally, participants were assured of the anonymity of their responses and strict confidentiality. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), anonymity means the “researcher cannot identify the participants from information that has been gathered” (p.121).

**Instrumentation**

After reviewing the literature on instrumentation for measuring the perceptions of elementary school principals toward professional development, it was determined that
interviews would capture the themes and patterns of the perceptions of principals toward professional development in their roles as instructional leaders.

The researcher was unable to find any existing instrumentation during the search of the literature, which might elicit perceptions from principals about professional development and its impact on instructional leadership. Therefore, the researcher developed a conceptual framework to align key themes culled from the literature around two aspects; (1) professional development models, and (2) professional development components. Using the conceptual framework as a benchmark, an interview schedule was designed composed of open-ended questions and related probes designed to collect in-depth information for the eight principals during face-to-face interviews (Appendix F).

An expert panel was convened to review and provide feedback on the construction and content of the interview questions. The interview questions were vetted through an expert panel in the field of instructional leadership, professional development for principals, and leadership capacity building. Any interview questions found by members of the expert panel to be leading or not constructed well were re-written to meet the appropriate criteria.

Participants contributed to the one-on-one interviews by participating in open-ended interview questions, sharing their perceptions on professional development, and discussing their perspectives on the impact of professional development as instructional leaders. Based on the participant’s responses the researcher followed up with open-ended questions. The researcher followed an interview schedule with twenty open-ended and follow up questions. According to Fowler (2014), an interview schedule is, “a guide an interviewer uses when conducting a structured interview” (p. 24). The interview schedule
included exact questions to be asked during the interview along with directions on how to proceed with the interview (Fowler, 2014). This form of interview supported the researcher’s ability to capture the perceptions of principals toward professional development. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) share the importance of interviews in that interviews serve to obtain information on “present perceptions of activities, roles, feelings, motivations, concerns, and thoughts (p. 355). The interview sessions were recorded for accuracy and transcribed exactly. The professionally transcribed interviews assisted the researcher in distinguishing the patterns and themes related to professional development and the perceptions of elementary school principals.

**Validity and Reliability**

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “validity, in qualitative research, refers to the degree of congruence between the explanation of the phenomena and the realities of the world” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) further state specific general terms for the purposes of qualitative research that are used to maintain agreement in the findings. These terms include validity, reflexivity, and extension of findings (p. 330). Subsequently, “a test is said to be reliable if it yields consistent results” (Patten, 2012, p. 73). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) also note the importance of validity in qualitative research by describing the validity of the qualitative designs “as the degree to which the interpretations have mutual meanings between the participants and researcher. Thus, the researcher and the participants agree on the description or composition of events and especially on the meaning of those events” (p. 330). The process used to establish validity for this research includes instruments such as interview questions.
The reliability of this phenomenological investigation was ensured through specific steps outlined in the study (Rawat, 2002). These steps are described accordingly so that the study can be replicated if warranted. As stated by Rawat (2011), “if there are certain generalizations made through the research, other researchers, through following the same procedures should be able to find the same generalized conclusions” (p.1.) According to Patton (2002), the field tests and subsequent interviews support the researcher in describing the phenomenon as it actually exists. The use of multiple interviews with different participants will assist in ensuring the validity of the instruments by comparing the consistency of the results. Additionally, a panel made up of experts on elementary school principals’ professional development and impact on instructional leadership reviewed the interview schedule questions and offered constructive feedback for content validity and reliability. The field test participants took part in the interviews and provided information on the validity of the interview schedule.

**External Validity.** According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a researcher must be cognizant of the external validity of a study. This includes ensuring the population’s external validity is clear and can support generalized themes and conclusions. It is also important that the “researcher accurately generalize from the sample to the general population” (Patten, 2012, p. 93). One of the threats to validity includes selection bias. The expert committee, Chairperson and researcher reviewed the purposeful sampling in the participant selection and came to consensus on the appropriateness of the participant selection.

**Internal Validity.** Another consideration is understanding internal validity as it relates to this research study. Patten (2012) further explains the importance of
understanding the explained “observed changes” as perceived by the researcher. To ensure internal validity, Patton (2002), describes strategies to ensure the observed changes are without bias and credible. These include inductive and logical reasoning within the study. According to Patton (2002), inductive “involves looking for other ways of organizing the data that might lead to different finds. Logically means thinking about other logical possibilities and then seeing if those possibilities can be supported by the data” (Patton, 2002, p. 553). This research study included three elements of qualitative inquiry described by Patton (2002).

- Rigorous methods for doing fieldwork that yields high-quality data that are systemically analyzed with attention to issues of credibility.
- The credibility of the researcher, which is dependent on training, experience, track record and presentation of self, and
- Philosophical belief in the value of qualitative inquiry, that is, a fundamental appreciation of the naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods, inductive analysis, purposeful sampling, and holistic thinking (Patton, 2002, p. 553).

Additionally, the triangulation of data (multiple interviews) supported the validity of this study. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) report triangulation as the “cross-validation among data sources, data collection strategies, time periods, and theoretical schemes. To find regularities in the data, the researcher compares different sources, situations, and methods, to see where same pattern keeps recurring” (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 379). The researcher and an expert in the field participated in coding the data to ensure the analysis was accurate and the actual findings are described.
Patton (2002), describes this process as “developing some manageable classification or coding scheme…to recognize the patterns into meaningful categories and themes” (Patton, 2002, p. 463).

**Data Collection**

The data collection process included a systemic approach specifically outlined to include the methods used to collect the data. First, an expert committee of district assistant superintendents from the elementary school districts selected elementary school principals who met the criteria for the research. The dissertation committee members and the researcher of this study provided the superintendents an explanation of the research study requirements by phone and via email, and initiated the participation of the elementary principals following purposeful sampling protocols from the four elementary school districts in the Santa Clarita Valley. Secondly, the researcher provided the participants with an introductory letter to explain the purpose of the study and the procedures to be used in the research study. Third, all participants were required to read and sign an agreement prior to their participation in the study. The safety of all participants was protected following Brandman’s IRB professional standards, which consist of protecting the participants’ human rights including their “right from undue risk” (Brandman University, IRB, p.1). A field-test of the interview schedule with two elementary school principals (selected by the assistant superintendents) was conducted. The purpose of the field-test was to determine whether the interview schedule was effective in its ability to gather information needed to address the research questions. Lastly, the principals were asked to voluntarily participate in one-on-one, one–to-two hour interviews with the researcher during an agreed upon mutual time.
Timeframe of the Study

The following time line represents a summary of the tasks that the researcher carry out to identify and select the study sample, to develop the interview schedule and collect and analyze the data.

**September 2013.** Extensive research to include examining the various studies on principal’s professional development and impact on instructional leadership by educational experts such as Marzano et al., (2007), DuFour (2014), Reeves (2014), and Guskey (2000).

**March 2014-September 2014.** Analyzed the literature and concepts related to professional development models and components in the elementary school setting. Developed a conceptual framework associated with the research that led the researcher to design categories within the conceptual framework that would help to anticipate the principal responses related to professional development models and components.

**October 20-25, 2014.** Developed interview questions and follow up probes to address the two research questions. Finalized and prepared chapters I, II, and III along with the instrument and series of letters that were used to inform superintendents and elementary principals who comprised the study sample.

**October 26-October 30, 2014.** Developed the criteria and process for contacting assistant superintendents for nominating principals for this study with committee members and chairperson.

**October 31, 2014.** Communicated with the selected expert panel to review the survey instrument and offer constructive feedback relative to all interview questions.

November 9 2014. Met with dissertation chair and committee to discuss and seek approval for the study proposal.

November 10-November 21, 2014. Submitted the proposed research to the Brandman University Instructional Board (BUIRB). Received approval from BUIRB.

December 2014. Researcher contacted selected assistant superintendents to nominate potential principals for the study.

December 2014. Met with the nominators and mailed letters to the administrators selected to particpate in this study. Sent an introductory letter to two nominated principals selected for the field test in this study.

December 2014. Conducted a field-test of the interview schedule with two elementary principals. The purpose of this field-test was to determine whether the interview schedule was effective in its ability to gather the specific information needed to address the research questions.

December 2014. Conducted the interviews with the six elementary school principals selected to participate in this study.

January 2015. Transcribed, analyzed, classified and summarized the data from the six interviews. Prepared documents for the expert panel members to establish reliability of the data classification system.
February 2015. The report of findings and conclusion completed.

February 2015. Met with dissertation committee chairperson to critique the results of the details of the data analysis.

February 2015. Prepare, finalize, and schedule oral defense.

March 2015 File approved copy.

Data Analysis and Coding

The researcher created a content analysis to identify themes and patterns in the data. Patton (2002) describes this process as “identifying the patterns of experiences participants bring to the program, what patterns characterize their participation in the program, and what patterns of change are reported by and observed in the participants” (Patton, 2002, p. 250). Patton (2002) asserts that data analysis “involves creativity, intellectual discipline, analytical rigor, and a great deal of hard work” (p. 442). The interview data was professionally transcribed, analyzed, and coded for key words and phrases related to principals’ perceptions of professional development, and their perceptions related to principals’ instructional leadership capacity.

The data was organized, studied, and summarized to include consistent words and phrases through the process of coding, as common themes were identified. Some potential themes that emerged were categorized to include the following:

- perceptions of principals toward professional development and its impact on principals as instructional leaders;
- models of principal professional development most effective to build teacher’s instructional capacity with direct instruction;
most effective components of professional development to build principals’ instructional leadership capacity.

The review of the literature was used extensively to reinforce or negate the main ideas and themes that emerge from the data analysis.

**Limitations**

The study is limited to elementary principals within the Santa Clarita Valley elementary school districts who voluntarily participated in the study. This sample population represents a small number of principals and is not indicative of the perceptions of all principals in the Santa Clarita Valley. Due to the small sample size, the results of this research study are not generalizable. The experiences described throughout the study reflect the ideas and perceptions of the selected principals within the Santa Clarita Valley elementary school districts.

The participant interview data is self-reported and can present possible limitations. The data includes interviews with several participants to help limit and minimize the self-reported bias. Additionally, another limitation includes the bias of the researcher. The researcher is a former principal in one of the elementary school districts. The researcher incorporated the expertise of the superintendent panel to limit the bias of the investigator.

The distinctiveness of this study is limited to the professional development provided to eight elementary school principals within the Santa Clarita Valley, and is not representative of the professional development provided to all principals within the Santa Clarita Valley. The themes, generalizations, and conclusions of this study are based on the results of this research and the targeted population sample.
Summary

This chapter includes the phenomenological approach used to conduct the study of elementary school principals’ perceptions of professional development, and the impact of professional development on their instructional leadership. The purpose of the study and the research questions are identified in Chapter III. Additionally, the methods that were used to code perceptions of elementary school principals are identified in this chapter.
CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This chapter presents the research findings, including a thorough examination of the interviews conducted with six elementary school principals regarding their perceptions of the professional development they received and its impact on their instructional leadership. The data and findings include key words and phrases that identify and describe the common themes of the professional development models that these six elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley perceived as having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership; that is, to building their teachers’ capacity for improving classroom instruction.

The six principals were nominated by their assistant superintendents and chosen to participate in this study because of their commitment to improve student achievement by engaging in continuous professional development. The primary findings are organized by each research question and by the conceptual framework. This chapter presents the analysis of the data, with rich descriptions of the principals’ perspectives, to assist in answering the research questions. The actual names of the principals and the names of their schools are not included in the study in order to protect their identity and their perspectives on professional development.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation is to identify and describe professional development components that elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley perceive as having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership related to building teachers’ capacity for improving classroom instruction.
Research Questions

The study sought to provide an in-depth understanding of the perceptions of six elementary school principals regarding professional development in the area of instructional leadership in order to answer the following research questions.

1. What models of professional development do selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive as having the most impact on improving their instructional leadership to build teachers’ capacity to improve classroom instruction?

2. In what ways, if any, do selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive that certain professional development components have an impact on improving their instructional leadership to build teachers’ capacity to improve instruction?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

The sources used to gather data for this investigation were audiotaped structured interviews. These interviews enabled the researcher to collect data on the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding the ability of models of professional development to build the capacity of teachers to use direct instruction. This data collection process allowed the researcher to analyze themes and patterns, and assisted the researcher with presenting the perceptions of selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals’ on the impact of professional development on their instructional leadership.

Population

The population for this study encompassed principals in the elementary public school districts of the Santa Clarita Valley. Although all principals possess knowledge
about professional development related to improving instructional leadership, this study focused on elementary school principals who were perceived by their assistant superintendents to have successfully utilized various professional development models, and who were effective instructional leaders known for their ability to build teacher capacity for improving instruction in the classroom using direct instruction.

The Santa Clarita Valley is located in Northern Los Angeles County, and was selected due to the researcher’s geographical location and accessibility to potential participants. The elementary school districts were identified using the most recent Los Angeles County School District Directory. This directory listed all the schools, superintendents, district grade levels, and contact information for each district in the Santa Clarita Valley.

Sample

Purposeful sampling for this research study allowed the researcher to learn and obtain in-depth information regarding the professional development of elementary school principals and their perceptions on the impact of professional development on their instructional leadership. Using purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to “capture and describe central themes” providing the researcher with rich information regarding the phenomenon (Patton, 2002, p.234).

The participation of the eight principals in the sample was identified through a nomination process. A letter was sent to Santa Clarita Elementary School District Assistant Superintendents introducing the researcher, along with an explanation and the purpose of the research (Appendix C). The researcher asked the assistant superintendents to identify principals who met the criteria of the study. To limit any potential bias, the
dissertation candidate’s chair reviewed and approved principals on the nomination list who:

- Were currently serving as principal of an elementary public school in the Santa Clarita Valley;
- had a minimum of three years’ experience as an elementary school principal;
- actively participated in professional development on an ongoing basis as evident in the school district’s professional development plan, and;
- were high performing principals who consistently implemented newly learned leadership strategies, as evidenced through observations by their superintendent.

A list of nominated elementary school principals was generated for participation in the study. The researcher met with the dissertation committee chair to discuss the nominations. From this list a total of eight principals who met the selection criteria were selected. Two principals from the nomination list were selected for the field test. The field test allowed the researcher and the expert members to ensure the interview questions were appropriate to continue with the study.

A letter of introduction was sent to each of the participants via email. The letter provided information about the researcher, the research topic, and the criteria required to become a participant in the study (Appendix D). An email attachment included a Participant Consent form and a copy of the Participant’s Bill of Rights. This latter form described the study in more detail by including the purpose, procedures, risks, and the assurance of confidentiality (Appendix E).
The participants were asked to take part in an audiotaping session of one to two hours. The purpose of audiotaping participants is to carefully capture their responses (Patton, 2002). It is vital during the data collection phase “to record as fully and fairly as possible that particular interviewee’s perspective” so as to have a complete understanding of the data being collected (Patton, 2002, p. 380). Audiotaping provides a vehicle to capture exactly the information provided by the participant (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The researcher personally called the eight selected elementary school principals to ask if they were willing to participate in the study, and if they were willing to participate, the researcher established a time for the interview. The confirmed interview time was followed up with a Google Docs invitation via email. Each principal obtained and signed an informed consent form that was approved by Brandman University’s IRB. The eight participants were provided with an overview of the research, benefits of the study, and potential harms of the study at an introductory meeting. Participants were allowed to opt out of the study at any time. Additionally, participants were assured of the anonymity of their responses and strict confidentiality. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), anonymity means the “researcher cannot identify the participants from information that has been gathered” (p.121).

**Demographic Data**

This research investigation was conducted in four elementary school districts in the Santa Clarita Valley. These four districts serve over 20,000 elementary school students. A total of eight elementary school principals were interviewed for this study. The participants’ ages ranged from 40-60. Their individual professional knowledge
included four to twelve years of experience as an elementary school principal. All of the
participants were female. All the participants in the study have Masters degrees with
administrative credentials. Four of the eight principals interviewed had earned doctoral
degrees from highly regarded universities, while two other principals will begin their
doctoral programs in the near future. All of the principals in this study are well known in
their district for their commitment to student achievement and for supporting their
teachers with effective direct instruction strategies. In addition, the principals participate
in continuous professional development in the area of instructional leadership.

Findings presented in this study reflect the ideas and perceptions of the
elementary principals interviewed by the researcher. While some of the participants
expressed similar viewpoints and ideas about professional development and its impact on
their instructional leadership as elementary principals, others held unique perceptions
based on their individual experiences with professional development and how it impacted
their own instructional leadership practices to improve classroom instruction.
Table 2

Demographic Data of the Sample

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<th>PARTICIPANTS</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>YEARS of EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>PARTICIPATION IN ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
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</table>

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The analysis of the data is reported following each of the research questions. A detailed content analysis was used to determine the main themes that resulted from the participant interviews. The interview data was transcribed, analyzed, and coded for key words and phrases related to principals’ perceptions of professional development, and their perceptions associated with principals’ instructional leadership capacity. The two field test participants took part in the interview process, and the transcripts of their interviews provided in-depth information on the reliability of the interview schedule. The researcher and the expert panel member concluded that the information derived from the field test was reliable, and that the themes and patterns regarding principals’ professional development and its impact on their instructional leadership could help address the research questions. Careful examination of the field tests showed that professional development for principals produced meaningful themes of collaboration, continuous
learning, and networking with colleagues. The field test participants consistently identified Instructional Rounds and Learning Walks as significant models of professional development that principals can use to improve direct instruction. The field test results allowed the researcher to continue with the study and conduct the remaining interviews. The field test showed the researcher the appropriate procedures to use in conducting interviews, and the researcher followed these procedures when she interviewed the remaining six participants.

Patton describes this process as “identifying the patterns of experiences participants bring to the program, what patterns characterize their participation in the program, and what patterns of change are reported by and observed in the participants” (Patton, 2002, p. 250). Patton (2002) asserts that data analysis “involves creativity, intellectual discipline, analytical rigor, and a great deal of hard work” (p. 442). Six principal interviews were conducted. The interview data was transcribed, analyzed, and coded for key words and phrases related to principals’ perceptions of professional development, and their perceptions related to principals’ instructional leadership capacity. To ensure inter-rater reliability, the researcher and an expert in the field independently participated in coding the data to ensure the analysis was accurate and the actual findings were described accordingly.

The data from the structured interviews of the six participants was organized, studied, and summarized to include consistent words and phrases through the process of coding, as common themes were identified. Some of the themes that emerged were categorized to include the following:
- Perceptions of principals toward professional development and its impact on principals as instructional leaders;
- Models of principal professional development for principals that are most effective to build teachers’ instructional capacity with direct instruction;
- Most effective components of professional development to build principals’ instructional leadership capacity.

The review of the literature was used extensively to reinforce or negate the main ideas and themes that emerged from the data analysis. The researcher and the expert in the field analyzed the transcribed interview data by making notes and highlighting recurring words and phrases. Specific ideas emerged and categories were created to identify common themes regarding professional development models and components of professional development for elementary school principals.

A content analysis following each of the research questions assisted the researcher in classifying the data into central categories. The themes were identified and described using the conceptual framework. The coded categories identified recurring patterns of professional development models and components of professional development, which principals perceive as providing assistance with their instructional leadership.

**Research Question Number One:**

*What models of professional development do Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive as having the most impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teachers’ capacity to improve classroom instruction?*
Descriptions of principals’ perspectives collected through structured interviews were analyzed to answer research question number one. The principal’s interviewed responses were consistent regarding the various models of professional development described in the conceptual framework. Central themes and patterns were created identifying the professional development models having the most impact on principals’ instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve classroom instruction.

Table 3

Content Analysis of Professional Development Models

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Models</th>
<th>Key Words and Phrases Provided by Participants</th>
<th>Number of Related Comments</th>
<th>Descriptions of Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conferences and Workshops</td>
<td>Important topics covered in conferences and workshops (i.e. Common Core, lesson design, data, direct instruction) Working with colleagues</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Material focuses on Instruction (i.e., Instructional leadership) Networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ACSA Conferences-a sample of conference</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Develop common language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bring information learned back to school sites and teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Structured Conversations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stay abreast of new educational ideas</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Implementation of new models of education</td>
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Table 3

Content Analysis of Professional Development Models (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Models</th>
<th>Key Words and Phrases Provided by Participants</th>
<th>Number of Related Comments</th>
<th>Descriptions of Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effective implementation of skills learned at school sites</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Support for principals to implement new strategies at school sites</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual professional development</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Self Driven</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in Collegial Conversations</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Collegial conversations Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Model of Professional Development (ongoing collaboration)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Research-based strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References to DuFour and DuFour (2010) and training with PLCs</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Data collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive impact on data collection and results to drive instruction.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Student achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective instructional approach to support effective instruction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Improved instructional leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research-based strategies with proven record</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Calibrate effective research-based practices</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on direct instruction strategies</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Direct instruction strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching provides confidence to me as a principal</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Models</td>
<td>Key Words and Phrases Provided by Participants</td>
<td>Number of Related Comments</td>
<td>Descriptions of Themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous work with consultants as a form of coaching</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Effective feedback to improve instructional leadership</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaboration with colleagues</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Consistency in Professional development to improve as an instructional leader</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous feedback (more consistent coaching/mentoring for principals)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Develop trust and collegial relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concerns with funding</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for trusting environment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Rounds/Learning Walks</td>
<td>Most “valuable” form of professional development</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research-based strategies discussed</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Researched Based</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration in effective use of instructional strategies</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Direct Instruction strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calibration of effective instructional practices</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Effective feedback strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on direct instruction</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Assistance to the principal in Improving Instructional leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation of learning walks and instructional rounds</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sustainable training</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

*Content Analysis of Professional Development Models (continued)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Models</th>
<th>Key Words and Phrases Provided by Participants</th>
<th>Number of Related Comments</th>
<th>Descriptions of Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feedback to support principals with instruction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Common Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing support for principals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifelong learner</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Continuous learning with research-based strategies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can I support my teachers?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Attend trainings with teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning with teachers</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Collaborative environment (support for one another)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning from colleagues</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Common Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collegial conversations</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Learn and work with one another Build leadership capacity of all educators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build capacity of individuals within the organization</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Structured/Unstructured collegial conversations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support with instructional demands of leadership (Common Core)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research-Based</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conferences and Workshops**

All elementary school principals interviewed participated and attended conferences or workshops throughout their tenure as principals. Each principal stated that
the majority of the conferences and workshops supported their efforts as instructional leaders. The principals shared that in many cases they individually initiated attendance at a conference or workshop, and they participated in the conference. The principals also stated they actively participated in the workshops and conferences mandated by their school district.

The Association of California School Administrators conference (ACSA) is an example of a conference mentioned and attended by every principal interviewed. The principals reported that attending the ACSA conferences supported and reinforced their instructional leadership with the direct instruction model. One principal stated:

…I attended the ACSA Conference last year and I learned about analyzing lessons and supporting teachers with direct instruction. It was valuable, I brought back many new ideas for my teachers” (Principal #1, personal communication, December 15, 2014).

Another principal described the district leadership conferences she attended as “valuable and helpful” with regard to her instructional leadership (Principal #6, personal communication, Dec. 19, 2014).

One of the principals shared her experience participating in a specific workshop. She stated:

…just recently we had Dr. Dennis Fox give us some training and he talked about going in the classroom and just observing portions of the lesson-- the beginning of the lesson, middle of the lesson and then the closure --and talking about how you can really expand your expertise when you’re only focusing on a very small amount of things and you do it repeatedly over and over again. So I think one of
the things that’s really helped me is going in and just looking specifically for that part of the lesson. It’s really helped me hone my skills to know exactly what I am looking at and exactly what should be present in a high quality lesson in each of those parts (Principal #6, personal communication, December 19, 2014).

All of the principals favored participating in conferences and workshops to improve their instructional leadership skills. The principals appreciated learning new concepts and theories to support their efforts as instructional leaders. They all agreed this model of professional development positively impacts instructional leadership.

One consistent theme that emerged from the interviews included the idea of effective implementation of the skills learned from the conferences and workshops directly back in the classroom to support teachers. An example of this perception was expressed by one of the principals as follows:

I learn from every conference and workshop I attend. The problem becomes how do I...implement the new material back at my school? How do I present the concepts to my teachers in meaningful ways that makes sense to all teachers? Accountability becomes the next step as I try to...implement new ideas from the conferences. (Principal #3, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

Other principals interviewed expressed apprehension about the implementation of newly learned material from conferences and workshops. Principals questioned how they could effectively implement the new skills they had learned to consistently support teachers with new instructional strategies.

All the principals appreciated participating in various conferences and workshops throughout their career as elementary principals because the conferences and workshops
supported their efforts as instructional leaders, especially in supporting teachers with direct instruction. The review of the literature verifies this concept. Fullan (2014) asserts the importance of immediate implementation of skills learned. Principals returning to their school sites felt that the conference or workshop provided reinforcement for them to support their teachers with direct instruction.

**Professional Learning Communities**

According to all the principals interviewed, Professional Learning Communities, as a form of professional development, serve as a continuous model for professional learning. Interestingly, each principal described Professional Learning Communities as a unique form of professional development, which assisted them in instructional leadership, specifically in assisting teachers with direct instruction. Four of the six principals interviewed had extensive training in Professional Learning Communities. The other principals had limited exposure learning about Professional Learning Communities, but they understood the premise of this form of professional development. Every principal interviewed made references to DuFour & DuFour (2010), researchers and pioneers in leading schools with the effective implementation of Professional Learning Communities.

Principals stated that participating in Professional Learning Communities training impacted their instructional leadership in a positive manner. For example, training in Professional Learning Communities assisted the principals with analyzing student data to drive instruction. Principals saw this as an effective instructional approach. Additionally, principals described Professional Learning Communities as supporting their ongoing conversations about effective research-based instruction. Principals agreed that Professional Learning Communities are an example of effective professional
development that uses research-based strategies that have successful outcomes to improve instruction. One principal shared her Professional Learning Communities experience:

I would like to point back to the PLC (Professional Learning Community) training because it’s the first time that really helped me to frame my conversation around data with teams, and I think once we really started having open conversations surrounding data, you can’t help but to have those, and not cycle it back to instruction and instructional practices (Principal # 3, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

Another principal remarked

I really grew as a professional by being with other colleagues and learning about the model of PLC as we examined research-based strategies to support direct instruction. (Principal #6, personal communication, December 19, 2014).

Principals shared similar experiences with regard to their training in Professional Learning Communities and the positive impact on their instructional leadership. One principal described her experience with the research on Professional Learning Communities training:

We just started doing a little bit of training on the actual PLC model with one of our trained principals leading us through the process, and I’ve read the books, the PLC books by the DuFours, and worked on implementing some of that (Principal # 2, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

Collegial conversations that arose from participation in Professional Learning Communities’ training was another theme brought up in the principals’ interviews. Four
of the six principals shared their perceptions regarding the increase in collegial conversations amongst their colleagues. According to the principals, collegial conversations focused on research-based strategies, direct instruction, and student achievement. Principals’ views on the impact of collegial conversations were evident in all of the interviews conducted. The perceptions of the principals are supported by the review of the literature in CHAPTER II. DuFour & DuFour (2010) state that the very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to collegial learning of each member (DuFour & DuFour, 2010). Overall, the principals interviewed for this study found training in Professional Learning Communities was an effective professional development model to improve instruction and support their instructional leadership.

Coaching

Principals interviewed shared various thoughts on coaching as a form of professional development. While every principal shared some information regarding their coaching experiences, only two of the six principals interviewed received formal coaching as a method of professional development to assist with their instructional leadership. One principal’s experience with formal coaching included working with another principal (on special assignment) as a “coach.” This principal participated in weekly visits with her coach to review student data and plan next steps to improve instruction. This coaching opportunity allowed the principal to assist teachers with lesson studies and direct instruction strategies. She stated:

And so we actually have been working in a coaching model, so she (coach) has come and we’ve looked at our practices here and we’ve looked at student
outcomes. We’ve looked at RtI and she has actually been coaching teams but at the same time assisting me with looking at direct instruction…it is probably the most effective. After ten years of being an administrator, this has been the most effective model for me and it’s really made me think about having more of that kind of coaching onsite for teacher teams…(Principal #3, personal communication, December 17, 2014)

Another form of formal coaching mentioned by the principals was working directly with outside consultants. This form of coaching included consultants who assist and provide specific instructional support for principals. One principal remarked:

Getting honest feedback from the consultants as a form of coaching provides me with data to improve my leadership skills. The consultant (coach) helps me with the outside perspective and provides me with the tools needed to implement strategies at my school site (Principal # 2, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

Another principal mentioned having a colleague as a mentor. According to the review of the literature, this is considered informal coaching. This colleague provided a trusting environment in which they shared informal conversations about instructional leadership. The majority of the principals described this same type of coaching experience. One principal felt very comfortable speaking with her colleague as well as asking for assistance. She indicated:

Although I do not have an official coach, I’m comfortable calling and asking a designated colleague for assistance so that I can clarify and ask them about RtI and data. (Principal #4, personal communication, December 16, 2014).
Another principal’s coaching experiences were limited; however she was grateful for the valuable information that a colleague gave her. This principal learned about direct instruction strategies from her colleague, and how to support teachers with effective feedback regarding lesson design. While this coaching experience took place over a short period of time, it served to support the principal with instructional leadership strategies.

The majority of the principals interviewed agreed that developing trusting relationships in coaching evolves over time. The principals also agreed that having a successful coaching program requires a trusting environment where principals feel comfortable and secure sharing instructional practices. Equally, principals appreciate the value of learning from their coaches. Principals also understand that receiving valuable feedback on their instructional leadership skills is needed for continuous professional improvement.

The information reported by principals on coaching as a form of professional development is consistent with the literature review in CHAPTER II. As noted by Reiss (2007), “leadership coaching can create lasting school change…through establishing special trusting relationships” (Reiss, 2007, p.71). In general, the principals interviewed agreed that coaching as a professional development model positively impacts their instructional leadership and can assist principals in building teacher’s capacity to improve instruction.

**Instructional Rounds and Learning Walks**

Instructional rounds as a form of professional development was valued and appreciated by the majority of the principals interviewed. Five of the six principals interviewed actively participate in instructional rounds, learning walks, and walkthroughs
as forms of on-going professional development to improve their instructional leadership skills. The following statement was shared by a principal as evidence of the benefit of participating in this model of professional development on an ongoing basis:

I think it’s actually the best form of professional development, not only for the principals but also for the teachers. And I’ve participated in all of the above, instructional rounds and learning walks and then also lesson studies…we’ve done learning walks for our direct instruction of reading, so that was our first one we had this year. So we went around and looked at reading groups—how they use text types and icons and thinking maps to teach critical thinking and close reading strategies. It was a valuable experience learning from one another (Principal # 4, personal communication, December 16, 2014).

These five principals also received formal training in conducting instructional rounds and learning walks. The principals viewed instructional rounds and learning walks as sustainable professional development that effectively supported their instructional leadership. Another principal shared:

I’ve participated in all of them and they’ve helped me tremendously! So, first starting off with just walking through with colleagues or our consultant, just walking through classrooms and learning how to look for instructional components rather than just focusing on classroom management and what’s on the walls and stuff like that, learning how to hone in on the instructional practices that are happening and connecting it with how the brain learns and who, what is happening in the classroom is affecting the students (Principal # 2, personal communication, December 17, 2014).
Another consistent theme regarding instructional rounds and learning walks was that they build a common language regarding effective instructional strategies. One principal expressed:

…when we do learning walks…we are able to look for certain things. So let’s say we’re looking for better practice and we walk through and we’re looking to see evidence of better practice, we’re looking for evidence of gradual release, and then we take all that information that we received and put it together and we’re able to give a picture to the staff of what it looks like in our learning walk. We build our common language on best practices. We are able to talk about the common good things that are happening and what our next steps need to be (Principal # 5, personal communicating, December 15, 2014).

Principals interviewed also agree that instructional rounds and learning walks provide a “built in” professional development model for collaboration on effective research-based strategies. Principals found this form of professional development easily accessible because conducting learning walks does not require you to go to a training away from the campus. Thus it creates a continuous model of professional development at the school site.

The recurring themes for instructional rounds and learning walks also included the idea of having honest conversations on the effectiveness of the feedback given in these observations of instructional practices. Principals interviewed described instructional rounds and learning walks as opportunities for rich discussions regarding direct instruction. Principals also found this model of professional development to be an effective way to provide feedback on instructional strategies to teachers.
One principal commented:

It absolutely did (instructional rounds and learning walks) and not only that, using the instructional tools, the FAST Framework (lesson template), using that tool has really helped me, so now I can very quickly go into a classroom and spend a period of time- I don’t have to spend hours, but a period of time and watch for specific things and give very succinct, direct feedback to the teachers (Principal #6, personal communication, December 19, 2014)

Instructional rounds and learning walks as forms of professional development were found to be most effective in impacting the instructional leadership of principals to improve direct instruction. The review of the literature confirmed that instructional rounds and learning walks support educators with discussions of direct instruction strategies and implementation of research-based methods to improve student achievement (City et al., 2009).

**Building Leadership Capacity as a Form of Professional Development**

All six principals interviewed participated in building leadership capacity through structured conversations with colleagues. All principals interviewed agreed that participating in structured collegial conversations regarding direct instruction strategies supported their efforts as instructional leaders. One principal remarked:

Mostly we have done that (structured conversations) through that administrative council. Throughout our process in building professional learning communities at the sites and as a district, we’ve read a lot of research and come back and had some great in-depth conversations about that research and also we’ve been given protocols along the way to take some of the protocols for having those
conversations that could be kind of repeated at the site and used with PLC teaching teams. So we’ve been engaged in that kind of really looking at best practices and research by reading articles and books about leadership and instruction and being an instructional leader. *The Principal* is the latest one that we’ve been studying…(Principal #3, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

Building the leadership capacity of principals as a form of professional development surfaced throughout the principals’ interviews. The principals commented on their experiences regarding collegial conversations with their peers as a form of building their leadership capacity. One of the principals shared:

So working with other administrators as a form of professional development, I feel it’s probably one of the most effective ways to support my instructional leadership, because it’s very specifically detailed to what I’m doing at my particular site. And I think also goes with leadership…ideas on how to provide more training when we see an area of need, specific things that we’re looking for, kind of more the next steps. Those conversations: “What did you do that worked?” “This is what I’m doing, it doesn’t seem to be working.” They’re still stuck at this level, how do I push them onto the next level?” Like brainstorming…(Principal #5, personal communication, December 15, 2014).

Another principal’s experience with collegial conversations and building capacity included unstructured conversations with colleagues. Although her experiences were not considered formal structured conversations, she felt that the opportunity to have informal conversations assisted her with her instructional leadership. She stated:
Nothing that I can say that was done in a structured setting, I don’t know, through informal conversations. There is a new principal at (location) who seems very much interested in instructional leadership and so she and I have been connecting more…so I’m starting to have those professional discussions with her in an informal basis (Principal #1, personal communication, December 18, 2014).

During the interviews, all six principals expressed similar ideas regarding building leadership capacity. One principal specifically mentioned:

…building leadership capacity for me gives me ideas. I think having those discussions gives me perspectives from other people because I think all of us have our own leanings towards one thing or another and so when you get those outside perspectives and you have those conversations then you can think, oh yeah, I didn’t think about that and maybe I need to do this little bit more, it gives me a different perspective (Principal # 2, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

It was evident throughout the principal interviews that building leadership capacity and collegial conversations were critical to successful instructional leadership and greatly impacted principals’ ability to improve instruction.

The review of the literature indicates that building leadership capacity in collaborative settings through collegial conversations supports principals by sharing effective instructional practices (DuFour, 2014). As stated by Fullan (2014), “the point is that district collaboratives present new opportunities for principals to learn from each other on a much wider scale for the benefit of their own schools and districts. In doing so, they can become better change leaders” (Fullan, 2014, p. 113).
Research Question Number Two:

In what ways, if any, do selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive that certain professional development components have an impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve instruction?

All six principals interviewed for this research study agreed that four specific components of professional development had an impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teachers’ capacity to improve instruction. The four components are: effectiveness, design, access, and support.

Table 4

Content Analysis Professional Development Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Professional Development Components</th>
<th>Key Words and Phrases provided by Principals</th>
<th>Number of Related Comments</th>
<th>Descriptions of Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness</td>
<td>Conferences/Workshops with follow up on implementation of new strategies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Professional Learning Overtime (Sustainable) Learning from colleagues Data collection (classroom observations and student achievement).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning of various strategies-Direct instruction</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Observe colleagues</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Data driven</td>
<td>15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Research based</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Continuous learning from one another</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focused on student achievement</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Development Components</td>
<td>Key Words and Phrases provided by Principals</td>
<td>Number of Related Comments</td>
<td>Descriptions of Themes</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design</td>
<td>Focus on direct instruction</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Data collection and effective feedback to improve instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on Common Core State Standards</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Relevant to current pedagogy (direct instruction strategies) Learning with teachers as professional development for principals</td>
</tr>
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<td>Lesson studies</td>
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<td>Learning with teachers as professional development for principals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning from the experts</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Aligned with district and school instructional goals (accountability)</td>
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<td>Learning walks and relevance to direct instruction</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Rounds</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation of Professional Learning Communities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Learning with teachers</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Application of newly learned strategies</td>
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Table 4

Content Analysis Professional Development Components (Continued)

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<th>Professional Development Components</th>
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Effectiveness of Professional Development

The effectiveness of professional development for principals includes the quality and usefulness of what principals learn during the professional development time. All six principals agreed that effective professional learning involves models of professional development that encompasses learning over time. As expressed by one principal:

…professional learning over time, not just a one shot thing. I think it’s really important that we have the ability to come back after we’ve worked on a certain aspect of developing teacher’s effectiveness and we have an ability to come back and talk about it, talk about where we need to go next with that and have that opportunity for continual conversation (Principal #5, personal communication, December 15, 2014).
Principals’ perspectives regarding effective professional development include sustainable learning over time. All of the principals interviewed agreed that professional development needs to go beyond the actual training. Professional development sessions are wasted if there is inadequate follow through (Guskey, 2000, Senge et al., 2012). Another principal described her perspective on the effectiveness of professional development:

…so when we look at professional development it’s not just the actual training that happens; it’s all the whole thing that goes outside of that training that can make it sustainable. When you look at every little piece that needs to come in place to make that training sustainable, that’s when it is the most effective and that does include the coaching and the support with all of it…(Principal #6, personal communication, December 19, 2014).

One of the effective models of professional development includes instructional rounds and learning walks as they provide the ability to observe colleagues in action and learn from an actual classroom setting. One principal shared her experience of learning from a colleague as an example of immediate implementation of the new instructional skills acquired:

Learning from one another…when another principal walks classrooms with me in a non-evaluative capacity…it’s a lot of discussion between her and between me about my plan and it’s alignment to the district’s plan and data and RtI and then practices that she knows with her expertise to yield the kinds of outcomes that we’re looking to have with our kids. And then it’s her modeling that kind of teaching and then we pull the teachers together and we look at model lessons. We
look at the curriculum together and we plan what’s going to take place in those classes…(Principal #3, personal communication, December 17, 2014)

The majority of the principals consistently indicated that effective professional development embraces a continual focus on effective instructional practices and an emphasis on student achievement. Five of the six principals interviewed stated that effective professional development embraces research-based practices that are implemented through a strategic process. A principal who participated in professional development with this focus describes one specific example of this strategic process:

What helped me with the model of Brain-Based Direct Instruction is that it is research-based: how the brain learns, how children growing up in poverty learn about actual reasons behind direct instruction. But I also think what helped me a lot with this model is it gave me very specific things to look for when I’m watching instruction and it helped me see what’s more effective and what’s less effective, and it gave me a gauge, basically something to measure as far as effectiveness and ineffective practices…(Principal # 2, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

The review of the literature points to evaluating the effectiveness of professional development of principals as a means to provide consistent and accurate support for all educators (Guskey, 2000). The perspectives of the principals interviewed correspond with the review of the literature.

**Design of Professional Development**

The design of professional development, from the principals’ perspectives, included several components. All six principals agreed that the focus on data is important
when designing professional development. From the principals’ perspectives, the data collected includes examining classroom instruction with significant feedback and analyzing student achievement data to drive instruction. These perspectives are commensurate with the review of the literature. Guskey (2000) asserts, “To determine actual needs, alternative methods of gathering information should be considered. Examples include observations, formal and informal assessments, interviews, analysis of school wide or individual classroom data, student assessment results and examination of current research evidence” (Guskey, 2000, p. 57). A principal expressed her thoughts on data collection to explain how she felt supported with her instructional leadership needs:

…you know, working with me directly, having me collect the data, then actually looking at the data and talking about what it means, where we are, where we need to go from there is huge. The data collection has been huge, because I walk through classrooms all the time…I’ve never really taken the time until we started the professional development to actually log what I’m seeing and analyze it (Principal #5, personal communication, December, 15, 2014).

Another principal further shared her experiences with data collection as the basis for her professional development:

…we have been able to take the data and help the teachers with their instruction by using the data. So driving our instruction based on the results of the data (Principal # 1, personal communication, December 18, 2014).

Of the six principals interviewed, five of them agreed that the focus on direct instruction as a foundation for their professional development assisted them with their
instructional leadership. One of the principals described her experiences with the direct instruction professional development model:

Our professional development included showing us kind of model lessons in video format of best practices across the district and then really going back and giving us the research and the basis for why certain continuums need to be out into practice at each of our schools…(Principal # 3, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

All six of the principals interviewed concurred that professional development in direct instruction is a primary focus and emphasis for their professional instructional leadership development. From the principals’ perspective, the focus on direct instruction during professional development provides the principals with the structure to support the teachers with quality instruction. The research verifies this and indicates principals indirectly influence student achievement through supporting their teachers with effective direct instruction strategies (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, Hattie 2012).

Another powerful design element for professional development from the principals’ perspectives includes learning with teachers. Remarkably, all six principals interviewed attend and participate in teacher professional development. The majority of the principals indicated that while some of their districts mandate that they attend the in-services with their teachers, they all agreed it is the best form of professional development as they learn alongside their teachers. One principal described her experiences with attending the teacher trainings:

…as a leader I’ve been attached to the classroom. I’ve always made it point to be at trainings with my teachers and to kind of learn alongside my teachers, which
really that book, *The Principal*, really underscores and underlines over and over
and over again (Principal #3, personal communication, December 17, 2014).
Another principal shared her experience participating in teacher trainings as a
form of professional instructional development:

I always feel like whatever the teachers are trained in, I need to be trained in, as
an instructional leader, and I feel comfortable going into demo lessons and
participating with them (Principal # 4, personal communication, December 16,
2014).

Similarly, the following principal explained her perspective on her participation in
teacher training and its effectiveness:

When we are there (PD with teachers) the teachers feel like it’s important for my
principal to be here, I need to pay attention to it. It also provides us with the
insight, to get their needs. When I go to these staff developments…I get to be one
of them, one of my teachers. I sit there and when they talk and they plan, my first
thought is that what am I going to need to support them? And ideas come up
(Principal # 4, personal communication, December 16, 2014).

Another professional development component that surfaced during the interviews
is the alignment of the school’s instructional goals with the district’s instructional plan.
According to five of the six principals interviewed, the design of the professional
development plan is closely aligned with the district and school instructional plans. This
includes the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP), which is a mandated plan from
the state of California. The LCAP is a strategic plan organized to address and set goals
for the instructional professional development of teachers and administrators in order to
meet the needs of all students. A principal shared her experience aligning her school’s instructional plan with the LCAP instructional goals:

…so my goal is to ensure that the information in the school plan is aligned to district goals and the LCAP that help to drive instruction with direct instruction strategies and professional development to support teachers (Principal # 1, personal communication, December 18, 2014).

From the principals’ perspectives, the accountability component of designing effective professional development to meet the needs of educators and support instructional leadership is challenging. The majority of the principals agreed that district instructional goals must include opportunities for principals to be directly supported with instructional strategies in preparation for supporting teachers with the demands of the Common Core State Standards and 21st Century Learning. The review of the literature confirms the principal’s perspectives as the demands for quality professional development focused on instructional leadership is needed today to support teachers with quality instruction in the classroom (Reeves, 2009, Fullan, 2014).

**Access to Professional Development**

All six principals interviewed agreed that access to professional development encompasses several factors. While many of the principals interviewed feel fortunate to participate in various professional development opportunities, consistent themes appeared throughout the interviews to indicate the most critical elements to access professional development. One of the important themes identified by the principals included the concepts of self-motivation and self-driven actions by the principals to learn more about effective research-based instructional strategies. These actions include continuous
learning through professional readings and participation in self-selected conferences and trainings. Interestingly, all six of the principals made references to experts in the field of education such as Michael Fullan, author of *The Principal*. Principals shared their insights in learning and implementing the instructional leadership practices acquired from respected experts in education. These insights allowed principals to assist teachers with direct instructional strategies. One of the principals shared:

I think some of it (professional development) it’s self-driven, not necessarily given to me by the district. I enjoy professional readings on the most current research of instructional practices and try to implement and support my teachers. One particular book that has supported my professional development is *The Principal* (Principal # 2, professional communication, December 17, 2014).

Another consistent theme that emerged throughout the interviews was the principals’ concerns with adequate funding for effective professional development. All of the principals agreed that quality professional development entails costs that may not be available at this time. As an example, many of the learning walks and instructional rounds require teacher substitute costs not readily available to all schools and districts. One principal describes her concerns with funding:

It’s all about the money. I am able to attend some of the PD available to me but it is limited. Most of the times spent in administrative council meetings are on manager related topics, not instructional. The district cannot afford to send all of us to every training (Principal #1, personal communication, December 18, 2014).

Consistently, principals interviewed shared that prioritizing the school and district goals and establishing non-negotiables with instructional objectives was necessary. This
process provided them with a guide on selecting effective models of professional development that are cost effective and afford the most effective resources to support their instructional leadership.

The review of the literature reveals the importance of analyzing and evaluating the cost of quality professional development. The research supports the principals’ perspectives with the cost concerns of professional development. The research also supports the importance of prioritizing professional development to meet the needs of principals’ for effective instructional leadership (Guskey, 2000).

Consistency and timeliness of effective professional development was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Many of the principals agreed that having a consistent professional development program focused on instruction would impact their instructional leadership. One principal described:

...You know, we went to this training, we thought we understood and now we get back to school and as it happens all the time, we’re kind of stuck on did miss on how to just, like, roll this out? Do we go fast? Do we go slow? Do we start with this and that? How can we be consistent with the professional learning if we are not sure? (Principal # 3, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

Additionally, principals described the need for consistent implementation of skills and practices learned during professional development. Principals noted that the application of newly acquired skills might be difficult to accomplish as implementation may require additional time and resources not readily available. Similarly, Pfeffer and Robert (2000), as noted in Reeves (2006), share the Knowing-Doing Gap where implementation of newly acquired instructional skills are not immediately put into
practice. The authentic implementation by principals of newly learned information from conferences and workshops remains in question as to its effectiveness, consistency, and impact on instruction.

**Support of Professional Development**

The consistent theme of collaboration appeared in all six interviews. For the principals, collaboration is at the core of their professional development and impacts their instructional leadership in a positive manner. Whether through Professional Learning Communities or professional development conferences, principals concur collaboration among colleagues is the most powerful component of professional development. One principal’s experience was distinctly articulated:

The peer support from especially the district office, they have come and walked with us, has really helped. It has been wonderful, and it’s also been really great to talk with other administrators. I feel like I can call somebody and say, how are you doing this? Can I come to your school site and see that? I am meeting with a principal over the break. We are going to work together on our instructional plan…Sometimes you work in isolation and you don’t get to hear what other principals are doing. Working collaboratively and having peer support is most important to me…(Principal #6, personal communication, December 19, 2014)

Another principal expressed collaboration as an integral component of her professional development:

I think working with colleagues is huge, through other principals and then the training we’ve had…the ongoing training has been very beneficial…all of the ideas they have, bringing that in and then working with teachers…that
collaboration piece, I think collaboration is huge (Principal # 5, personal communication, December 15, 2014).

Additionally, another principal shared her thought that collaboration was the most effective form of professional development for her growth as an instructional leader:

To be honest, I think with what was offered to me as a principal, I think the biggest thing that has helped me has been working with colleagues and having those collegial conversations. Having those collaborative discussions on instruction has been most valuable to improve instruction (Principal # 2, personal communication, December 17, 2014).

The review of the literature supports the theme of collaboration as an effective component of professional development. Collective learning by colleagues and collaboration increases the knowledge and supports educators with instructional leadership to reinforce direct instruction strategies in the classroom (Lambert, 2003, DuFour et al., 2014, DuFour & Marzano, 2010).

The principals also viewed their profession as isolated at times; therefore the need to have continuous support from colleagues was a constant theme. The idea of continuous support from colleagues and working as a learning community is reflected in the literature review in CHAPTER II. Working collaboratively in teams with agreed upon common instructional goals supports the common objectives of improving instruction (DuFour et al. 2010).

Another consistent theme presented by the majority of the principals was the idea of a comprehensive needs assessment in support of effective professional development. Five of the six principals shared that their perspective was taken into account after a
professional development was completed. Usually a needs assessment survey is requested with their feedback after the completion of a professional development session. This process assists in providing valuable information on the professional development received, and guides the planning of future professional development. Principals agreed that a needs assessment, which includes their perspectives on the quality of professional development, is important because it can improve future professional development. Principals indicated a desire for a needs assessment prior to the creation of professional development, in order to meet the professional development needs of principals as instructional leaders.

**Summary**

This chapter presented the phenomenological research findings. It includes a thorough examination of the interviews conducted with six elementary school principals regarding their perceptions of professional development and the impact of it on their instructional leadership. Through an extensive interview process with the elementary school principals from four Santa Clarita Valley school districts, descriptive rich themes were identified and studied.

Common themes of professional development models and components that elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley perceive as having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership were classified and described. Overarching conclusions from the research data were analyzed. These included the perceptions of the principals regarding their experiences with professional development, and the impact of professional development on the ability of their instructional leadership to improve instruction in the classroom.
Professional development that impacts their instructional leadership includes:

- a collaborative learning environment where all members feel supported and learn from one another;
- studies in research-based strategies supported by educational research;
- a focus on continuous learning for all educators.

These themes occurred throughout the principals’ interviews. Principals described collaborative professional learning environments, which are supported with research-based strategies, do assist the principals to improve their instructional leadership.

All of the principals reported that professional development models such as conferences and workshops, Professional Learning Communities, Coaching, Instructional Rounds, and Building Leadership Capacity support their efforts as instructional leaders. Through the interview process, principals identified key details of professional development components. These components include effectiveness, design, access, and support. The majority of the principals perceive these components to contribute to the successful implementation of professional development, which impacts their instructional leadership.

Additional themes that emerged in the principal interviews included collaboration, learning from one another, research-based strategies, and the use of data to improve instructional leadership. The majority of the principals interviewed also agreed that Instructional Rounds and Learning Walks impact their efforts as instructional leaders, especially in assisting teachers with direct instruction in the classroom. The next chapter will present the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter reviews the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the methodology of the study. A summary of the major findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further research are also presented in this chapter.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation is to identify and describe professional development components that elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley perceive as having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership related to building teachers’ capacity for improving classroom instruction.

Research Questions

To provide an understanding of the perceptions of elementary school principals regarding professional development in the area of instructional leadership, the study sought to answer the following research questions.

1. What models of professional development do Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive as having the most impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve classroom instruction?

2. In what ways, if any, do selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive that certain professional development components have an impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve instruction?
Methodology

The study used a phenomenological research design with structured interviews to investigate the professional development of elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley and the impact of this professional development on instructional leadership. This research design focused and described the perspectives of elementary school principals with regard to professional development models in the area of instructional leadership, as well as the components of these professional development models that were most beneficial to the principals’ instructional leadership. The one-on-one structured interviews with eight elementary school principals were transcribed, which allowed the researcher to identify themes and patterns regarding the elementary school principals’ perceptions of their professional development and its impact on their instructional leadership.

Population and Sample

The population for this study encompasses elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley elementary public school districts located in Los Angeles County. Currently there are forty-two elementary school principals working in the Santa Clarita Valley. Although all principals possess knowledge about professional development related to improving instructional leadership, this study focused on those elementary principals who were perceived by their assistant superintendents to have a strong knowledge base about professional development and its impact on building teacher’s capacity with direct instruction. Additionally, the principals selected to participate were those who were known by their assistant superintendent to have successfully utilized various professional development models at their schools to improve instruction. The
researcher in this study focused on elementary school principals in school districts in the Santa Clarita Valley as the target population. Principals from the various elementary school districts were nominated by selected Santa Clarita Valley Elementary School District Assistant Superintendents as potential candidates to participate in this study as the target population. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), “a target population is a group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research” (p. 129). The Santa Clarita Valley was selected due to the researcher’s geographical location and accessibility to local participants. The Santa Clarita Valley is located in Northern Los Angeles County.

The research study followed purposeful sampling. In purposeful sampling “people are selected because they are information rich and illuminative… they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002, p.40). Purposeful sampling for this research study allowed the researcher to learn and obtain in-depth information regarding the professional development of elementary school principals and their perceptions on the impact of their instructional leadership. Using purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to “capture and describe central themes,” providing the researcher with rich information regarding the phenomenon (Patton, 2002, p.234).

The participation of eight principals in the sample was identified through a nomination process. A letter was sent to Santa Clarita elementary school district assistant superintendents introducing the researcher with an explanation and purpose of the research (Appendix C). The researcher contacted the elementary assistant superintendents in the Santa Clarita Valley and asked them to identify potential principals who meet the
criteria of the study. The assistant superintendents were asked to identify principals who meet the criteria. To limit potential bias, the dissertation Chair reviewed and approved principals from the nomination list who:

- Are currently serving as principal for an elementary public school in the Santa Clarita Valley;
- Have a minimum of three years experience as an elementary school principal;
- Actively participate in professional development in an ongoing basis as evident in the school district’s professional development plan;
- Are high performing principals who consistently implement newly learned leadership strategies evident through observations by superintendents.

A list of nominated elementary principals was generated for potential participation in the study. The researcher met with the dissertation Chair to discuss the nominations. From this list a total of eight principals who meet the criteria were selected. A letter of introduction was sent, via email, to each of the participants. This letter provided information about the researcher, the research topic and criterion required to participate in this study (Appendix D).

**Major Findings**

The phenomenological approach for this research study produced various findings regarding the perceptions of elementary school principals on professional development models and the impact of the professional development on their instructional leadership to improve instruction. The study focused on identifying the perceptions of elementary school principals from the Santa Clarita Valley and identified principals’ perceptions on
professional development models having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership related to building teachers’ capacity for improving classroom instruction. The study also focused on identifying themes related to the professional development components that had the greatest impact on improving the principals’ instructional leadership. The data collected addressed the following research questions.

**Research Question Number One**

*What models of professional development do Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive as having the most impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve classroom instruction?*

Similar comments contributed by the principals during the interviews were grouped together and then used to identify related themes and categories. This research study produced meaningful findings consistent with the educational research on professional development and the impact of professional development on principals’ instructional leadership. The review of the literature was used to affirm, or negate the findings from the qualitative data.

**Findings Related to Professional Development Models**

Central themes and patterns were created identifying the professional development models having the most impact on the principals’ instructional leadership role of building teacher’s capacity to improve classroom instruction. All the principals interviewed found the following professional development models to have an equal positive impact on their professional development, and supported their needs as
instructional leaders: Conferences and Workshops, Professional Learning Communities, Coaching, Instructional Rounds/Learning Walks and Building Leadership Capacity.

From the principals’ perspectives, each of these professional development models provided them with resources to assist their teachers with direct instruction. Principals believed they were able to “take away” valuable information from the various professional development models. The principals interviewed are dedicated instructional leaders, and they saw the ability of all the professional development models to assist them in building the capacity of their teachers to improve instruction.

Although the principals agreed that they gained new knowledge by participating in the five professional development models, one of the key findings from the data involved the effective implementation of the newly acquired skills. All of the principals interviewed shared their perspectives on the difficulties of effectively implementing their newly learned skills back at their school site. The principals wanted to successfully implement the newly acquired instructional skills; however, time constraints or funding issues would not allow them to successfully implement the new strategies.

Based on the data collected, it was evident principals want to be successful with the implementation of newly acquired skills to provide them with the ability to support teachers consistently with direct instruction strategies. Ensuring principals’ application of the new knowledge acquired is consistently and accurately implemented was a theme that emerged from the interviews. The review of the literature confirms this idea as implementation of principals’ newly learned skills from professional development remains in question as to its effectiveness and consistency in implementation (Reeves, 2006).
Findings Related to Collaborative Environment Conducive to Learning

Recurring themes emerged providing the researcher with a wealth of information regarding principals’ perspectives and impact regarding principals’ professional development and instructional leadership. Another main theme that emerged throughout the data collection process was the principals’ belief that a collaborative environment is conducive to professional learning. All of the principals interviewed agree that the foundation for effective professional learning includes a collaborative model enhanced by collegial conversations based on educational research. As evidenced by the research, collaborative models of professional development include collegial conversations where educators share resources and learn from one another (Fullan, 2014). The research findings regarding collaboration as a form of professional development are consistent with the literature review.

From the principals’ perspectives, the professional development model that yielded the most opportunities for a consistent collaboration approach was instructional rounds and learning walks. Principals interviewed in this study perceived instructional rounds and learning walks to be successful forms of professional development that supports their instructional leadership. All of the principals shared in the belief system that through the process of conducting instructional rounds and learning walks, effective conversations in a collaborative environment evolved and supported their instructional leadership. The principals that participated in instructional rounds and learning walks were able to discuss direct instruction strategies and support teachers with the delivery of quality lessons. Additionally, principals were also convinced that participating in instructional rounds and learning walks with other administrators increased their
knowledge of effective instructional practices. Engaging in collegial conversations with other administrators supported the efforts of principals in providing support for teachers with direct instruction strategies. These findings concur with the review of the literature as instructional rounds and learning walks are evident forms of successful professional development to improve direct instruction strategies as a collaborative model (City et al., 2009).

**Findings Related to Professional Learning Communities**

According to all of the principals interviewed, collaboration is at the core of professional development. Principals’ comments during the interviews indicated that Professional Learning Communities is another form of professional development that supports their instructional leadership and creates a collaborative learning environment. Although some of the principals interviewed had not received formal training in Professional Learning Communities, all of the principals agreed with the tenets of Professional Learning Communities, specifically with the foundational belief of collaboration. The principals that received professional development following the guidelines of Professional Learning Communities felt strongly that this form of professional development supported their efforts to improve instruction.

Principals agreed that through Professional Learning Communities, administrators and teachers are able to participate in various discussions that are research-based and proven to improve instruction. Remarkably, every principal interviewed made references to the author Michael Fullan (2014) and his book *The Principal*. Each principal made comments to participating in some type of book study with *The Principal*. Through their Professional Learning Community, or learning with other principals, the principals
discussed strategies in becoming effective instructional leaders with a focus on direct instruction strategies. Principals also stated that in Professional Learning Communities they analyzed data (lessons or student data) and that this was a learning environment that used research-based strategies to support the principals’ instructional leadership.

Each principal stated they shared in their individual learning with colleagues and appreciated the opportunity to calibrate their knowledge. This process allowed principals to support one another and ensure consistency and accuracy in their work as instructional leaders to support quality instruction. The review of the literature supports the theme of professional learning as a continuous model for improving as an instructional leader. As stated by DuFour et al., (2010) “…helping all students learn requires a collaborative and collective effort” (DuFour et al., 2010, p.14).

**Findings Related to Collegial and Trusting Relationships**

The data also revealed that principals appreciated participating in coaching opportunities as a form of professional development. Some of the principals interviewed appreciated the collegial and trusting relationships created in a coaching professional development model. From the principals’ perspectives, coaching provides opportunities for honest conversations on specific instructional topics to support principals with their instructional leadership. According to the principals, working with a coach afforded them the opportunity to receive feedback on instructional leadership strategies. The principals indicated they valued conversations with their coaches regarding instructional strategies, which in turn supported their efforts in assisting teachers with direct instruction. Principals also appreciated the trusting environment that can be established through coaching, which creates an atmosphere conducive to learning and improving. The
research supports these findings. As referenced by Reiss (2007), “coaching provides ongoing support and opportunity for professional growth, confidence, and increased competence” (Reiss, 2007, p.30).

**Findings Related to Building Leadership Capacity**

Principal noted that building leadership capacity as a form of professional development increased collaboration and assisted in building a common language as instructional leaders. According to the principals, this form of professional development supports the efforts of principals and their instructional leadership. Support for one another was a central theme as principals discussed analyzing data and discussing effective instructional practices to improve instruction. The data included analyzing effective lesson delivery and student achievement data. As noted in the review of the literature, building leadership capacity includes opportunities for individuals within an organization to work in a collaborative environment and build the leadership capability of all involved with a focus on student achievement (Fullan, 2014, Senge et al., 2012, Lambert, 2003).

The principals reported that attending professional development with their teachers increased their knowledge and provided them with opportunities to support their teachers directly. Principals agreed learning new information along side teachers was a valuable form of professional development for principals. From the principals’ perspectives, this process permits for a collaborative environment where principals and teachers learn along side of each other. The research directly supports these findings as to improve student achievement; educators must “focus and improve on their collective professional practice” (DuFour et al., 2010).
Research Question Number Two

In what ways, if any, do selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive that certain professional development components have an impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve instruction?

The professional development components of effectiveness, design, access, and support were examined in this study. The perceptions of principals regarding professional development components were consistent with the review of the literature. (Fullan, 2014; Du Four et al., 2010.)

Findings Related to Effectiveness of Professional Development

The principals explained that for professional development to be considered effective in improving their instructional leadership it needed to include:

- Sustainable learning over time;
- Follow up on implementation;
- Learning from colleagues;
- Data collection;
- Research-based practices.

The central themes uncovered during the interviews included learning from one’s colleagues while using the student achievement data to support principals’ instructional leadership. Principals agreed that in order to implement learned skills from professional development, there is a requirement to maintain collaborative learning environments in which lessons studies and student achievement data are analyzed to improve instruction. The principals’ perspectives are supported by the research. DuFour et al., (2010) assert
that preserving a collaborative professional learning environment that consistently examines data improves student achievement.

Findings Related to Design of Professional Development

The principals agreed that the design of professional development needed to be relevant to school and district instructional goals, which are aligned with research-based practices. Additionally, principals had a shared understanding that the design of professional development had to encompass direct instruction strategies in order to support their efforts as instructional leaders. They also recognized and valued professional development that included learning alongside their teachers. The principals appreciated professional development designed to work collaboratively with teachers, and which was focused on direct instruction lessons and student data that were both examined in a structured setting.

The review of the literature supports the principals’ points of view. Guskey, (2000) explains:

“Professional development experiences are planned with explicit student learning goals in mind, it is much easier to identify procedures for measuring progress and verifying overall success. More importantly, clearly articulated learning goals bring focus and direction to all forms of professional development (Guskey, 2000, p. 208).

Findings Related to Access to Professional Development

The principals all agreed that a variety of professional development models are available, and all are easily accessible to assist with their professional development. In terms of access to these models, the principals distinguished the importance of self-
selecting what professional development they would attend. Principals self-selected and participated in professional development that assisted with their instructional leadership. Principals shared that their motivation to attend professional development was to gain valuable insights about their individual growth as instructional leaders. The review of the literature confirms that many professional development programs exist to support principals with their instructional leadership (Guskey, 2000).

Principals also agreed that implementation of the skills they learned in professional development depends upon their individual motivation to apply the newly acquired knowledge to improve instruction. They communicated that factors such as being consistent in applying the professional development, and obtaining the funding necessary to carry out the professional development at their school sites, may impact their ability to implement the instructional skills learned. Financial concerns particularly affect principals’ ability to implement effective instructional practices on a consistent basis.

Overall, principals concurred that access to professional development depends on their individual motivation to successfully participate and to implement the new instructional strategies at their school site.

**Findings Related to Support with Professional Development**

Learning from one another was a central theme that emerged from the principal interviews. The component of collaboration in professional development was mentioned several times by every principal. They valued continued support from colleagues in a professional learning environment.

Principals also shared that they respected the efforts of district personnel to create a needs assessment for professional development prior to designing the professional
development. Principals appreciated having their instructional ideas taken into consideration before planning and designing professional development to assist with their instructional leadership. Principals concluded that continuous support and effective collaboration with colleagues impacts their efforts as instructional leaders. The review of the literature supports these findings. Collaboration focused on instruction supports educators with effective instructional leadership and in turn improves student achievement (Fullan, 2014).

**Conclusions**

The data obtained in this phenomenological study support the following three conclusions regarding the perceptions of principals about professional development and its impact on their instructional leadership. Professional development that impacts their instructional leadership includes:

- a collaborative learning environment where all members feel supported and learn from one another;
- studies in research-based strategies;
- a focus on continuous learning for all educators.

**A Collaborative Learning Environment**

Principals reported that if a collaborative learning environment was created during professional development, it was conducive to their learning and provided a positive impact on their instructional leadership. Principals shared that the professional development models (conferences and workshops, professional learning communities, instructional rounds and learning walks, coaching, and building leadership capacity) all involved a collaborative approach, and supported principals with their instructional
leadership. Principals described professional development that was rich in collaboration and collective learning to be at the core of their individual learning experiences. The research concurs with these findings, as suggested by Guskey (2000), … “that in a professional development model, ample opportunities for collaboration and sharing will be provided” (Guskey, 2000, p.157).

Principals described a collaborative learning environment as a professional development model where members continuously learn from one another. Instructional rounds and learning walks provided each principal with the opportunity to collaborate on effective instructional practices such as direct instruction. Equally, principals who participated in Professional Learning Communities on a regular basis found this format of professional development provided consistency for a collaborative environment.

The majority of principals found that coaching supported a collaborative environment and contributed to their efforts as instructional leaders. The literature review confirms coaching as an effective form of professional development, supporting educators with collaboration for improving schools (Reiss, 2007).

**Studies in Research-Based Strategies**

Principals also noted that research-based strategies were essential elements for successful professional development. The discussion of research-based methodologies, such as direct instruction, during professional development gave principals the tools necessary for more fully implementing the methodologies and supporting teachers with their lesson delivery. As an example, professional development in direct instruction assisted principals in supporting teachers with effective lesson feedback. Additionally, the research-based strategy of studying lessons assisted in increasing student achievement
because it helped to ensure that the elements of direct instruction were implemented accurately. As noted in the literature review, the methodology of direct instruction, which is research-based, is effective in meeting the learning needs of students (Hattie, 2012; Hollingsworth and Ybarra, 2009; Marzano et al., 2005), and it supports the principal as an instructional leader (Hollingsworth & Ybarra, 2009; Fox, 2014).

**Continuous Learning**

Each principal as the basis for their professional learning mentioned continuous learning repeatedly. As the research indicates, elementary school principals are charged with providing a “culture of continuous learning, a culture of high expectations…and a culture of high excellence” (Morillo-Shone, 2014, p. 35). Today’s elementary school principals are expected to lead the way and provide ongoing support for their teachers, specifically in the use of direct instruction. Continuous learning of effective teaching strategies that are research-based and proven to improve instruction were perceived by principals to be significant outcomes of professional development. The principals’ responses about working alongside their teachers demonstrated their commitment to continuous learning. They shared their passion for continuous learning when they said that supporting their teachers with effective instructional strategies was a high priority.

**Implications for Action**

Professional development for elementary school principals requires school district leaders to explicitly design professional development that meets the needs of principals as instructional leaders for the 21st century. The data and research clearly state the importance of collaborative, research-based professional development models to support all principals with their instructional leadership. Based on the results from interview
participants and the conclusions regarding elementary school principals perceptions of professional development the following implications are recommended for the immediate implementation of practices and decision making in order to improve professional development for principals.

- School district personnel (superintendents and/or directors in charge of professional development) must design professional development that promotes a culture of collaboration, includes the perspectives of the principals, and supports their instructional leadership.

- School district personnel must include research-based approaches within professional development models to support the efforts of principals with direct instruction strategies.

- School district personnel must include professional development components that include elements of effective design, access, and support to principals as instructional leaders.

- School district personnel must support continuous learning by integrating professional development models such as Professional Learning Communities and Instructional Rounds and Learning Walks as consistent forms of professional learning for principals.

- The school board of education can support their districts by actively reviewing and approving professional development that is conducive to meeting the needs of principals’ instructional leadership.
• The County Department of Education must continue to provide resources, support, and professional development to district personnel charged with creating and leading professional development.

• All school and district leaders must continue to lead as examples of dedicated lifelong learners by participating in quality professional development that enhances their knowledge of effective instructional practices.

• The researcher will contribute and share the research results with the educational community through professional development, conferences, and research articles.

It is important to understand that professional development designed for school districts must be situational not generalizable. Professional development of school leaders requires meeting the unique needs of school districts’ instructional goals.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the findings of this research investigation, the following recommendations for further research are suggested:

• A study can be conducted to determine the effectiveness of professional development models with specific focus on other aspects of principals’ leadership, i.e., student discipline, school safety, communication, parental involvement, and support for classified personnel.

• Another study can be replicated to include the perceptions of teachers regarding principals’ professional development, and how principals’
professional development supports the teachers in their use of direct instruction.

- Another research study could include the perceptions of middle and high school principals on professional development and its impact on their instructional leadership. This study would provide information about instructional leadership for the middle and high school districts.

- A study can be conducted to determine the implications of instructional professional development for assistant principals, district directors, and department chairpersons. The research would provide additional perspectives on the professional development of school and district administrators.

- A study can be conducted to compare and contrast the various forms of professional development for principals in the area of instruction from the district superintendent’s point of view. The study would provide additional information to school districts on effective professional development for administrators.

- A study could be conducted to include the perspectives of principals who are not considered high-performing principals in the area of instruction. This study would provide information to support and improve the instructional leadership of principals who require additional support.

- Another study could be conducted to research other components such as application to content areas (i.e., math, reading) of professional
development for principals that would provide benefits and consistency in the various content areas.

- A study could be conducted to address professional development perceived by principals to have the least impact on their leadership skills. This would support the efforts of designing professional development conducive to effective professional learning.

- A research study could address the professional development of male elementary school principals and their perceptions on the impact on their instructional leadership.

- Another research study could be conducted to address the theme of collaboration and impact on effective professional development for elementary school principals.

**Concluding Remarks and Reflections**

The role of a principal as an instructional leader is to support teachers with their instruction and ultimately increase student achievement. The research indicates the principal’s role is critical to the success of direct instruction and the implementation of research-based instruction strategies. Fullan (2014) asserts “principals need to be specifically involved in instruction so that they are knowledgeable about its nature and importance” (Fullan, 2014, p.41).

Principals positively impact instruction by consistently supporting teachers with effective lesson design and feedback. Quality professional development for principals is important to the success of effective instruction. The research indicates a need for continuous support for principals with quality professional development. In a
collaborative environment that professional development often creates, teachers and principals learning from one another, supports effective direct instruction (Hattie 2012; Fullan, 2014).

This research investigation has inspired me, as a new director of curriculum and instruction, to work in collaboration with principals to improve instruction. The research validates the significance of professional development and the impact on principals’ instructional leadership. The perspectives and wisdom of the high-performing principals interviewed provide me with optimism and confidence. These principals are dedicated professionals, willing to work and collaborate alongside their teachers and colleagues in efforts to improve student achievement. My passion for quality instructional leadership is now stronger today.

This research study confirmed the importance of collaboration for instructional leaders, as well as the importance of continuous learning. Equally, the significance of quality professional development for principals and its purpose of improving instruction were very evident throughout the research. I am forever grateful to the principals whom I interviewed, and I know that the future holds many more opportunities for continuous learning for all of us.
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APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: LEARNING FORWARD

Professional Development Definition, According to the Re-Authorized Act of “No Child Left Behind”

(34) “Professional Development- The term professional development” means a comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals effectiveness in raising student achievement.

(A) Professional development fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and must be comprised of professional learning that;

(1) is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards as well as related local educational agency and school improvement goals;

(2) is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, and other teacher leaders;

(3) primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators engage in continuous cycle of improvement that-

(i) evaluates student, teacher and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance;

(ii) defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of the data;

(iii) achieves the educator learning goals identified in subsection (A) (3) (ii) by implementing coherent, sustained and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement;

(iv) Provides job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom;

(v) regularly assess the effectiveness of professional development in achieving identified goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meetings challenging state academic achievement standards;
(vi) informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning; and

(vii) that may be supported by external assistance.

(B) The process outlined in (A) may be supported by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that:

(1) must address the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level;

(2) advance the ongoing school based professional development; and are provided by for profit and non-profit entities outside the school such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialist and other education organizations.
## APPENDIX B: LEADERSHIP CAPACITY MATRIX, (LAMBERT, 2003)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Degree of Participation</th>
<th>High Degree of Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Low Degree Of Skill</strong></td>
<td><strong>High Degree Of Skill</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal as autocratic manager</td>
<td>• Principal as “laissez faire” manager; many teachers develop unrelated programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• One-way flow of information; no shared vision</td>
<td>• Fragmented information that lacks coherence; programs that lack shared purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Codependent, paternal/maternal relationship; rigidly defined roles</td>
<td>• Norms of individualism. No collective responsibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Norms of compliance and blame; technical and superficial program coherence</td>
<td>• Undefined roles and responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Little innovation in teaching and learning</td>
<td>• “Spotty” innovation; some classrooms are excellent while others are poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Poor student achievement or only short term improvements on standardized tests</td>
<td>• Static overall student achievement (unless data are disaggregated)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low Degree of Participation</th>
<th>High Degree of Participation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>High Degree Of Skill</strong></td>
<td><strong>Low Degree Of Skill</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Principal and key teachers as purposeful leadership team</td>
<td>• Principal, teachers, parents and students are skillful leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limited use of school wide data; information flow within designated leadership groups</td>
<td>• Shared vision resulting in program coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Polarized staff with pockets of strong resistance</td>
<td>• Inquiry-based use data to inform decisions and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Efficient designated leaders; others serve in traditional roles</td>
<td>• Broad involvement, collaboration, and collective responsibility reflected in roles and actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong innovation, reflection skills, an detaching excellence’ weak program coherence</td>
<td>• Reflective practice that leads consistently to innovation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Student achievement is static or show slight improvement</td>
<td>• High or steadily improving student achievement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: LETTER TO ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENTS

Dear (name of District Superintendent),

I am a doctoral student from Brandman University working on my dissertation in organizational leadership. The topic of my dissertation focuses on exploring types of professional development, available and utilized by elementary school principals, that have the greatest impact on their instructional leadership in building teachers’ capacity for improving student learning.

You are being asked to nominate principals in your district to participate in this study. The criteria for the principal participants includes the following:

a. Are currently serving as principal for an elementary public school in the Santa Clarita Valley.
b. Have a minimum of three years experience as an elementary school principal.
c. Actively participate in professional development in an ongoing basis.
d. Consistently implement newly learned leadership strategies.

This research will provide further information regarding professional development for elementary school principals. The research will include examining the efficiency of the professional development and its effectiveness for principals as instructional leaders. The study will also add to the literature, which analyzes the perceptions of elementary school principals toward professional development and the impact on principal’s instructional leadership.

The research will provide school districts with information for effectively preparing elementary principals for 21st Century learning, leadership capacity, and instructional leadership. Furthermore, school district leaders will gain current information on the perceptions of elementary school principals toward professional development and its effectiveness pertaining to instructional leadership. This study may also provide guidance for improving professional development that seeks to influence the instructional leadership of elementary school principals.

This research is important. It is critical to the success of this study that principals nominated demonstrate knowledge about instructional leadership approaches including direct instruction strategies to support teacher’s instruction. Because you know and interact with these principals frequently, your nomination of principals who meet these selection criteria will be extremely helpful.

Your involvement in this study requires only that you nominate principals. Thank you for your valuable assistance with my study.

Sincerely,

Isa DeArmas

Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Saugus Union School District
APPENDIX D: PRINCIPAL LETTER FOR INTERVIEW

Dear Principal ____________________,

My name is Isa DeArmas and I am a doctoral candidate at Brandman University (A Chapman University System). I am conducting a research study as part of my doctoral dissertation that focuses on identifying and describing the professional development components that elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley perceive as having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership.

The purpose of this research study is to identify and describe the perspectives of principals toward professional development and impact on instructional leadership related to building teachers’ capacity for improving instruction.

I am interviewing elementary principals from the Santa Clarita Valley who have been recommended by their superintendent as an effective instructional leader known for their ability to build teacher capacity for improving instruction in the classroom. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your experiences in various professional development models and how they may have impacted your ability to build teacher capacity in the classroom to improve instruction.

You are invited to participate in this study. The information gathered may assist in improving professional development in the area of instructional leadership to support principals with their instructional leadership. The study should not take more than an hour to complete and includes an interview. The interview will be audio-taped with your permission. Participation in this study is voluntary. Your identity as a participant will remain confidential.

If you have any questions, please contact me at dear4102@mail.brandman.edu. In addition to this email, I will also be following-up with a personal phone call.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Isa DeArmas
APPENDIX E: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. As part of my dissertation research for the doctorate in Organizational Leadership at Brandman University, I am interviewing elementary principals from the Santa Clarita Valley who have been recommended by their superintendent as an effective instructional leader known for their ability to build teacher capacity for improving instruction in the classroom. The purpose of this interview is to learn about your experiences in various professional development models and how they may have impacted your ability to build teacher capacity in the classroom to improve instruction. As we know there are many facets of instructional leadership; therefore it would be useful if you could focus your responses specifically on those types of professional development that led to your growth as an instructional leader directly connected to building teacher capacity for improving direct instruction in the classroom.

The interview will take about an hour and will include 20 questions. I may ask some follow-up questions if I need further clarification. Any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of my data will be reported without reference to an individual or an institution. After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you so that you can check to make sure that I have captured your thoughts and ideas accurately.

I want to make this interview as comfortable as possible for you, so at any point during the interview you can ask that I skip a particular question or discontinue the entire interview.

With your permission, I would like to tape record this interview so that I ensure that I capture your thoughts accurately. Thank you.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Part I Personal Demographics

1. Please state your name, position, name of your school district and where our interview is currently taking place.

2. Please share your educational background?

3. Can you share some information about your schools and districts’ demographics (i.e. population of city, district size, rural, urban)?

Part II. Research Questions

Research Question 1. What professional development models do Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive as having the most impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve classroom instruction?

1. As an elementary school principal have you ever attended a conference or a workshop to improve your instructional leadership?

   a. (If answered no): Why do you think you have not attended any conferences or workshops to improve your instructional leadership?
b. (If answered yes): Did you feel that this model of professional development prepared you to assist teachers with direct instruction in the classroom and if so explain why?

**Potential follow up question:** Can you think of a specific example of what you learned at the conference or workshop that helped you become an effective instructional leader?

2. As an elementary school principal have you ever participated in a Professional Learning Community (PLC) to improve your instructional leadership?

   a. (If answered no): Why do you think you have not participated in a Professional Learning Community?
   b. (If answered yes): Did you feel that this model of professional development prepared you to assist teachers with direct instruction in the classroom and if so explain why?

**Potential follow up question:** Can you think of a specific example of what you learned as a result of your participation in a PLC that helped you become an effective instructional leader?

3. As an elementary school principal have you ever participated in a Coaching program to improve your instructional leadership?

   a. (If answered no): Why do you think you have not participated in a Coaching Program?
   b. (If answered yes): Do you feel this model of professional development prepared you to assist teachers with direct instruction in the classroom and if so, explain why?

**Potential follow up question:** Can you think of a coaching experience that assisted in supporting your instructional leadership? Please describe your coaching experience.

3.

4. As an elementary school principal have you participated in Instructional Rounds (learning walks, walk-throughs with colleagues) to improve your practice as an instructional leader?

   a. (If answered no): Why do you think you have not participated in any type of Instructional Rounds?
   b. (If answered yes): Do you feel this model of professional development supports you as an instructional leader and if so, explain why?

**Potential follow up question:** Can you describe your experience of the instructional rounds and how it improved your practice to assist teachers with direct instruction in the classroom?

5. As an elementary school principal have you participated in building leadership capacity through collegial conversations as a form of professional development?
a. (If answered no): Why do you think you have not participated in any type of professional development that helped to build leadership capacity?

b. (If answered yes): Do you feel this model of professional development supports your instructional leadership? If so, explain why?

**Potential follow up question:** What other specific leadership capacity strategies (such as a collegial conversations) have prepared you to assist in building teacher’s instructional capacity?

4.

5.

**Research Question 2:** In what ways, if any, do selected Santa Clarita Valley elementary school principals perceive that certain professional development components have an impact on improving their instructional leadership for building teacher’s capacity to improve instruction?

1. Thinking back on your various experiences with professional development as a school principal, how would you describe an effective professional development model that helped your growth as an instructional leader for building teacher’s capacity to improve instruction?

6.

7. **Potential follow up question:** What specific components related to the effectiveness of professional development prepared you to support teachers with direct instruction in the classroom?

8.

2. As an elementary principal can you tell me how the following professional development design elements may have led to your growth as an instructional leader? Can you also share an example to back up your response?

9. a. Use of student performance data

10. b. Focus on direct instruction

11. c. Uses the inquiry process

12. d. Aligned with your school plan

13. e. Aligned with the district strategic plan

14. f. Principals had input into the actual use and design
15. **Potential follow up question**: What other designs of professional development do you find effective in assisting you to support teachers with direct instruction?

16.

3. As an elementary principal what have you found to be important for easy and reliable access to professional development that supported your growth as an instructional leader to improve teacher capacity for improving direct instruction in the classroom?

17.

18. **Potential follow up question**: What are some other forms of accessing professional development that have met your needs to supporting teachers with direct instruction?

19.

4. As an elementary principal what types of support for professional development have helped you to meet your needs as an instructional leader?

20. **Potential follow-up question**: Can you share some specific examples of professional development support that you have experienced leading to your growth as an instructional leader?

5. As an elementary principal what specific models of professional development have had an impact on you as an instructional leader to directly improve classroom instruction?

21. **Potential follow up question**: Which specific model of professional development has prepared you to support teachers with direct instruction?

22. **Potential follow up question**: Which specific model of professional development has prepared you to support teachers with direct instruction?

**Part III. Closing remarks**
Any additional comments you would like to make about your experiences with professional development and its impact on your instructional leadership, direct instruction, and building leadership capacity?
This concludes our interview. Do you have any other information that you would like to add or share regarding your experiences with professional development? Thank you very much for your time and support in completing my research. I will send, through email, the transcription of our interview for your feedback. If you would like a copy of my final research findings once the university accepts my research, I would be happy to share it with you. Thank you again.

I appreciate your time.
APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618

Information About: Professional development and the Impact on Elementary Principals’ Instructional Leadership

Responsible Investigator: Isa Monica DeArmas

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study is to identify and describe professional development components that elementary school principals in the Santa Clarita Valley perceive as having the greatest impact on their instructional leadership related to building teachers’ capacity for improving classroom instruction. This study will fill in the gap in the research regarding the impact of professional development and principals’ instructional leadership. The results of this study may assist districts in the design of effective professional development programs for elementary school principals.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in a one-on-one audiotaped recorded interview. The one-on-one audiotaped recorded interview will last between one – two hours and will be conducted in person. I understand that:

a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a secured location that is available only to the researcher.
b) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding the professional development of principals and impact on instructional leadership. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the professional development in which I participated. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Isa DeArmas. She can be reached by email at dear4102.mail.brandman.edu or by phone at 661.877.8405.
d) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.
e) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns
about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.
I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party

Signature of Principal Investigator

Date

Date
# APPENDIX G: DISSERTATION SYNTHESIS MATRIX

**Topic:** Professional Development and its Impact on Principals’ Instructional Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>Sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Models of Professional Development</td>
<td>Dufour, et al. (2010) define and provide a guide for creating Professional Learning Communities (PLC).&lt;br&gt;Professional Development practices include belief systems about student learning (Senge, 2012, p.400).&lt;br&gt;“Horizontal and Vertical transfer of new information” is explained by Joyce &amp; Calhoun (2010, p.100).</td>
<td>PLCs and requirements for school leaders are described with leadership practices, which include: “leading by serving, engaging through strategic disengagement, and effective leadership” (Kanold, 2011, p.3).&lt;br&gt;Guskey (2000), explores various forms of workshops as professional development (p. 200).&lt;br&gt;In the <em>Learning Leader book</em> by Reeves (2006), Guskey (2000) describes the “different levels of professional development” which influence professional growth (p. 101).</td>
<td>Joyce and Calhoun (2010), describe various models of professional development available to school leaders.&lt;br&gt;The need for additional development opportunities for leaders in needed especially with the Common Core Standards and new levels of accountability (Townley &amp; Schmieder-Ramirez, 2011).</td>
<td>Guskey (2000), explains the “Major models of professional development which include:&lt;br&gt;Training, Observations, Study Groups Action research, and Mentoring” (p.22).&lt;br&gt;Various types of professional development include: Coaching, in-services, workshops, and institutes (Learning Forward, 2014).&lt;br&gt;Fullan (2014), describes the idea of “social capital” in professional development (p.78).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as well as the quality of PD and its effectiveness in improvement of instruction.

The idea of professional development is that we are always learning…“we are never finished” (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010).

Elmore (2000), explains, “heavy investments in highly targeted professional development for teachers and principals in the fundamentals of strong classroom instruction are critical to the success of a school” (p.28).

Effectiveness of Professional development includes “team learning, synonymous with staff development…a nd everyone works together” (Senge, 2012, p.402).

The role of effective professional development includes systemic changes throughout an organization.

Aguilar et al., (2011), share in their research article “the goal of not merely produce structural change in the leaders’ work but rather to transform the culture of the entire organization to eliminate inequities within the education system and to get the best results for all students”(p.70).

Impact of Professional Development on Instructional Leadership

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Professional Development on Instructional Leadership</th>
<th>“Never underestimate the importance of Instructional Leadership” (Reeves, 2009).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principals’ responsibility is improvement of instruction</td>
<td>A Plan for Effective School Leadership- “collective efficacy and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Reeves, 2009).</td>
<td>implementation of newly learned knowledge.</td>
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<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Senge (2012), describes staff development models where “a</td>
<td>The “Knowing-Doing Gap” described further by Reeves (2006)</td>
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“Never underestimate the importance of Instructional Leadership” (Reeves, 2009).
| Leadership explained by Young (2004) provides standards for effective instructional leadership. Dimensions of Instructional leadership: Resource provider: ensures “teachers have material and supplies to perform their duties.” Instructional resource: communicator and visible presence to support day-to-day instructional activities” (Marzano et al, 2005, p.18). | “If the goal of professional development is improved practice, success can be achieved only by modifying existing theories-in-use. This is the goal of reflective practice and what differentiates it from other change strategies” Osterman and Kottkamp, 2004, p. 13). | “If the goal of professional development is improved practice, success can be achieved only by modifying existing theories-in-use. This is the goal of reflective practice and what differentiates it from other change strategies” Osterman and Kottkamp, 2004, p. 13). | Improvement of instruction includes “three well known elements: 1. a common curriculum 2. sound lessons 3. authentic literacy Additionally, understanding the Common Core State standards is critical to the improvement of instruction. (Schmoker, 2011, p.9). |

| Impact of Professional Development on Instructional Leadership | “Never underestimate the importance of Instructional Leadership” explained by Young (2004) provides standards for effective instructional leadership. Dimensions of Instructional leadership: Resource provider: ensures “teachers have | Principals’ responsibility to improvement of instruction (Reeves, 2009). “If the goal of professional development is improved practice, success can be achieved only by modifying existing theories-in-use. This is the goal of reflective practice and what | A Plan for Effective School Leadership-“collective efficacy and capacity” (Marzano et al., 2005 p.99). |

<p>| Focus on school results and instructional leadership (Reeves, 2006). Improvement of instruction includes “three well known elements: 1. a common curriculum 2. sound lessons 3. authentic literacy Additionally, understanding the Common Core State standards is critical to the |
| Building Leadership Capacity | Leadership Capacity for improving schools - Professional Development for opportunities to learn (Lambert, 2003, p. 22). Three important principles of building leadership capacity by Senge (2012) include: 1. Look at the real challenges facing schools. 2. Action Learning. 3. Leadership and Community engagement (p. 397). | “Provide opportunities for the staff to learn about classical pedagogical knowledge and current practice” through professional development (Fullan, 2014, p. 184). Fullan (1998), Addressed administrators at an ACSA (Association of California School Administrators) conference on the importance of “investment in local capacity” referred to as “human capacity” (Townley &amp; Schmieder, 2011, p. 73). Building collective capacity with focus on instruction (Fullan 2010, p. 21). Senge (2012), suggests, “professional development opportunities should allow individuals to “learn from one another and work with each other” (p. 397). Dufour (2014), describes building capacity to include professional development that “builds staff capacity to function as members of a high performing professional learning community” (p. 67). Maximizing instructional leadership through “collaborative practices…watch others in their work to improve instructional practice” (Fullan, 2014, p. 109). Fullan (2014) asserts, the importance of building leadership capacity with “focused collaborative work within and across schools and districts” (p. 67). Experts agree professional development needs to include building the leadership capacity of principals to support instruction (Dufour et al., 2010). |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching Models for Professional Development for Principals</th>
<th>Experts agree that one of the functions of professional development is to support one another through coaching strategies (Reiss, 2007).</th>
<th>“Supported school leaders on the job to improve performance” (Reiss, 2007, p. 29). Professional Development Guidelines for Human Resources department (Townley &amp; Schmieder, 2011).</th>
<th>“Leadership Coaching is a strategy for sustaining the best initiatives of an organization” (Allison-Napolitano 2013, p. 133).</th>
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<tr>
<td>Coaching and Collaborating</td>
<td>Coaching as professional development for principals involves individuals that have trusting relationships with their coaches and have also established rapport in which honest conversations surrounding effective instructional practices can be discussed openly (Whitworth et al., 2007).</td>
<td>“Process of building shared knowledge and the collaborative dialog about that shared knowledge that builds the capacity of staff” (DuFour &amp; Marzano 2011, p. 87).</td>
<td>Building a school culture that “supports staff development” (Deal &amp; Peterson, 1999).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explicit Direct Instruction and Instructional leadership</td>
<td>Definition of Direct Instruction and impact on instruction. Hollingsworth &amp; Ybarra (2009). According the Hollingsworth and Ybarra (2009), “extensive research studies and meta-analysis studies have come to the same conclusion: teachers-centered direct instruction is more effective and efficient especially for struggling students p.11).</td>
<td>Results Now (Schmoker, 2006) offers a comprehensive model for explicit instruction and improvement of instruction. Hattie (2012), Visible Learning for Teachers Direct Instruction strategies for effective student outcomes. Fox (2014), Data to Increase Student Achievement-Using Data to Drive Instruction Conference</td>
<td>Supporting each other with direct instruction practices including Instructional Rounds to improve practice. City et al., (2010). Charter Management organization, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, that the professional development of principals is continuously improved in an effort to increase direct instruction strategies and student achievement. (Leading for Effective Teaching, p.1). “An emphasis on professional development does not suggest that the quality of instruction is inadequate and must be fixed, but rather reflects the difficulty and complexity of teaching and acknowledges that is impossible to teach perfectly” (Danielson, 2002, p.35).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perceptions from Principals</td>
<td>Support from experts regarding principals’ instructional leadership skills (Glatthorn and</td>
<td>Enhancing principal effectiveness from various perspectives (Grissom and Harrington, &quot;Developing exemplary educational leaders” (Magnusson, 2011)</td>
<td>Advocating for principals’ involvement in professional development (Bartoletti, 2014)</td>
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<td>Schmoker (2006), asserts inconsistencies in the perspectives of educators regarding professional development.</td>
<td>Schmoker (2011) discusses PLCs, and states, “it’s about building a community of learners who can create an organizational structure and culture to maximize the opportunities for students” (p.445).</td>
<td>Learning Organizations and systemic approach (Senge, 1990).</td>
<td>Dufour (2010) states, “a review of effective leadership development strategies conclude “that the most powerful way to build the capacity of an individual to lead is not classroom training, but rather job embedded challenges that</td>
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<td>with the implementation of professional learning communities (p.106).</td>
<td>members are mutually accountable” (p.11).</td>
<td>are directly linked to the person’s ongoing work, organization’s goals and its strategies for improvement” (Dufour et al., 2010).</td>
<td>true professional learning community (p.187).</td>
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