A CASE STUDY OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY: AN INVESTIGATION OF SUSTAINABILITY WITHIN A RURAL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

A Dissertation
by
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December 2011

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ABSTRACT

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Literature supports the role of professional learning communities as a means of effective professional development for teachers and as a vital factor in increased student achievement. Research pertaining to the sustainability of the professional learning community is limited, therefore, this study was designed to provide insight into the sustainability of a professional learning community. The qualitative study was designed to investigate the type of culture that supported sustainability, the role leadership played in creating the conditions that support sustainability, and if changed teacher practices played a part in the sustainability of a professional learning community. The study’s methodology applied the use of focus groups, individual interviews, participant observations, and document review.
Data from the participant observations, focus group interviews, individual interviews, and document review were analyzed using the principles of grounded theory. Based on the analysis of the data, four overriding themes emerged: 1) Learning Focused, 2) Collaboration, 3) Leadership, and 4) Barriers. The four emerging concepts were used as the framework for discussion.

The findings endorsed that professional learning communities can be sustained when a school’s culture shifts to one that is collaborative and focused on learning, leadership is shared and distributed throughout the school, logistical and supportive conditions are in place, and teaching practices change as a result of using data to drive instruction.