

## ABSTRACT

Title of Document:                   PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT  
DEFIES THE FORMAL CONSTRUCT OF  
TEACHER LEARNING: A CHARTER  
SCHOOL'S COMMENCEMENT

Rollia M. Oliver, Doctor of Education, 2012

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In August 2006, in accordance with a recently passed charter school law, a Mid-Atlantic school district opened its first public charter schools. The charter schools' staff had opportunities to exercise autonomy over their instruction and had very little in-service training. This study examined what seven teachers at a newly created charter school did with their time to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional structured in-service training. I employed a case study approach to portraiture that was guided by Desimone's (2009) core features of professional development as the theoretical framework. The data were specific activities that teachers used in place of frequent in-service that reported by the participants. Elements of the activities teachers used to construct knowledge were analyzed using the core features of professional development. Content focus, collective participation, coherence, active learning, and duration were present throughout the data.

The data from this study revealed that teachers were deliberate in their actions. They constructed their own professional experiences and held themselves accountable. The retrospective nature, small sample of teachers, and limited span of focus for this study posed limitations. These findings have implications for designing professional development, facilitating autonomous instructional development, and future research.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT DEFIES THE FORMAL CONSTRUCT  
OF TEACHER LEARNING: A CHARTER SCHOOL'S COMMENCEMENT

By

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, my children, and my parents. My mother is one who lived a portrait of teaching and investing in someone else's future. My mother taught me, by example, to make learning fun so that my students would love to learn. This work also is dedicated to my late mother-in-law, who always found a way to make me laugh.

## Acknowledgements

I thank God, who is the author and finisher of my faith, for directing my path, and ordering my footsteps. He has kept me focused on accomplishing the goals that He set in my heart.

This dissertation was completed at the expense of my husband and children. With the deepest gratitude, I thank Eric, Ashley, Christopher, and Colby for their sacrifice, as I missed many activities that comprised their childhood. I thank them for not resenting me when my attention was devoted to my studies and writing. To my husband, I say, “Thank you for inspiring me to persevere when I just wanted to be Mommy and Wife.” The times that you called me ‘Doctor Oliver’ reminded me that I had a goal that I had not yet accomplished.

To my grandmother, who wanted her children to get “a good education.” I have learned from your 92 years of wisdom that there is no greater commodity than my education.

To my dad, I say, “Thank you for wearing my shoes when I was working and studying. You made sure my children made it to soccer, track, and cheerleading when I was studying and writing.”

To my sisters, thank you very much for all of the reading, editing, feedback, babysitting, and chauffeuring you did during this grueling process. I honestly believe that if you could have done any more for me, you would have.

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## **Chapter 1: Introducing the Portrait**

### **Background**

In 2003, a public charter school law passed in one Mid-Atlantic state. Pursuant to the passing of that law, a local school district (hereafter referred to as Doral County School System) opened its first public charter schools at the commencement of the 2006-2007 academic year. Notwithstanding the legal and political influences, some uncertainty and reluctance existed throughout the school district about the growing popularity of the charter school movement. Rhetoric and ongoing debates about the resource investment, value, cost, and effectiveness of charter schools only served to fuel this apprehension.

Opponents of the burgeoning movement insisted that charter schools took money away from public schools. However, they consistently ignored a major reality: charter schools were public schools, and charter school students were students of public education. Recognition of the official employers of charter school teachers served as a key indicator of the public aspect of charter schools. In the above referenced state, teachers who taught at charter schools legally reported to the local school district and received the same compensation and employment benefits as all (non-charter) public schoolteachers in the district.

Despite the public nature of charter schools, some differences did exist between the charter schoolteacher and the (non-charter) public schoolteacher when it came to the resources available to them. When Doral County School System's charter schools opened, the funding formula for charter schools in the state left many schools with insufficient resources to provide a quality learning environment for students or a positive

work setting for teachers. Many charter schools in the area had inadequate funding to pay for items essential to the teaching and learning process. Charter school leaders were unable to afford books for the school library, maps, LCD (liquid crystal display) projectors, manipulatives, and professional development training for teachers and staff. Despite discord about the impact of charter schools, resource shortages, and a general unfamiliarity with the landscape of these new entities, charter school teachers resolved to meet their students' instructional needs.

### **The Vision**

Pastor Dina Johnston, founder of Sapient Choice Public Charter School (SCPCS) was an educator steeped in experience and committed to ensuring that her students received the quality instruction they needed to be successful. She had taught in two local school districts and had teaching experience that spanned over 27 years. Her last ten years teaching in Doral County Public Schools ignited in her a passion for change that "caused some alienation at the county level." Her vision was "to provide a private school experience at public school expense." She further explained this vision:

What that meant was I really believed that all parents had and do have a right to quality choice, and parents should not have to pay tuition for children in elementary, middle, or high school. I'm an advocate of public education ... Even though I started in ministry the same year I started in public education, I knew I was not to start a private Christian school.

Pastor Johnston felt that money should not interfere with a parents' choice to provide their children with a high-quality education. During her last year of teaching in Doral County, she heard about the charter school initiative. As she learned about the charter school model, she knew that it was the embodiment of her vision.

“[It was], in essence, what was in my heart. It gives us the opportunity to provide the same quality of experience, control over class size, [and] selection of curriculum that you can do in a private school but without charging tuition.”

SCPCS evolved from a vision that many of the study participants called their “motivation” for the work they performed every day. Pastor Johnston had transferred her vision to the staff and to many of the parents at Sapien. Pastor Johnston summarized this unity of purpose by saying; “We are here to provide quality choice in public education to a chosen, gifted generation.”

The teachers at Sapien Choice had very few opportunities for structured in-service training. As a result, they could autonomously use time that Doral County had dedicated to professional development and in-service training. Researchers have not yet examined what teachers do with their time in the absence of distinct professional development activities, nor have they produced data that helps to identify the value of teachers’ self-directed activities. Laura Desimone (2009), whose research in this area is widely regarded, contended that many professional development opportunities for teachers exist within their work environment. Desimone’s research, which discusses improving impact studies, offered multiple platforms that support this study of how teachers promote their own professional development. Professional development affects students’ achievement and can be offered via several types of training (Banilower, Heck, & Weiss, 2007; Garet, Birman, Porter, Desimone, Herman, & Yoon, 1999; Kyriakides, Creamers, & Antoniou, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

## **Problem**

A review of literature revealed a vast body of research touting the relevance of teacher in-service and examining the various aspects of professional development for educators. Much of the research focuses on best practices for formal professional development, but a number of authors have asserted that school-based in-service is the most frequently used form of low-cost teacher training (Borman & Rachuba, 1999; Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, Yoon, 2001; Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Sandholtz, 2002; Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006). In Doral County, the frequent scheduling of in-service assumes that teachers are readily willing and interested in being involved in school-based in-service training for professional development. In cases like this one, teachers do not have the opportunity, the desire (Lieberman & Miller, 1990; Sandholtz, 2002), or the mandate from superiors to participate in in-service training. Understanding of how teachers respond when in-service training is not available contributes new insights into teachers' engagement in professional development. In Doral County, a significant amount of time was devoted to in-service activities.

Recognizing time as a relatively scarce and truly valuable commodity causes people to manage their time both deliberately and strategically. Only a few research studies have investigated how teachers spend their time without focusing on participation in structured training opportunities (Fine, 2010; Mis, 2008). However, emerging research has focused on teachers' independent time use for reflecting, analyzing students' work and collaboration are valuable to the success of their instructional practice (Arjoon 2009; Garet et al., 1999; Marzano 2003). Several studies have found that non-formalized

opportunities for teacher learning, like active learning and embedded learning activities, are undervalued forms of professional development (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Remillard, 2005). Active learning and embedded learning activities are explained in Chapter 2.

### **Purpose**

This study sought to fill current voids in existing literature by exploring teachers' use of time for learning in the absence of school-based in-service opportunities and to examine how teachers' approach to classroom-based knowledge building can serve as an avenue for fulfilling their personally defined learning needs. This inquiry addressed multiple forms of teacher learning, respected the research-based features of professional development, and considered how teachers use time and autonomy to affect their professional development opportunities.

In the chapters that follow, I will present the results of this study in the form of portraits and draw conclusions that can inform future research and policy decisions around professional development for teachers (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Specifically, this study sought to accomplish the following:

- to inform educators about how their autonomous and individualized pursuit of knowledge and pedagogy relate to professional development;
- to provide an image of how autonomous and embedded teacher learning and time use replaced structured in-service;
- to build on existing research by evaluating the data about core features of professional development;

- to capture the complicated, personal experiences of teachers in a very real and relevant portrait rich with thick detail.

### **Research Question**

Through this study, I sought to answer the following primary research question:

- What did the teachers in a newly created charter school do to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional structured in-service training?

### **Theoretical Context**

Teachers have multiple options when pursuing professional development opportunities and they can transition between prescribed and self-selected professional development activities. In-services are required, school-based trainings. Principals frequently make the decision to hire someone to conduct these trainings or to select staff members to facilitate the in-service based upon cost and available resources. In some cases, a school leader may decide that the resources to conduct an in-service simply are not available.

Regularly scheduled in-services can have varying value to the teachers who attend them. Participating teachers often have varied levels of experience and unique experiences and instructional needs. Some in-services may not be relevant to the needs of every teacher present. Sandholz (2002) found that many teachers only sporadically implement the skills and strategies they learn from the in-services they attend.

The present study is informed by this literature on teachers' use of time for learning, in-service models, characteristics of teacher's practice, professional autonomy,

adult learning, types of teacher learning, and five core features of professional development (Desimone, 2009). I will discuss this body of literature further in Chapter 2.

### **Significance**

A wealth of research exists that explores professional development for teachers. Available literature focuses on a number of topics including, in part, best practices for professional development, the most effective types of professional development and poor implementation of best practices. While the above list is not exhaustive, it reflects the primary focus of existing research on the topic. The following areas of study appear to be under developed in the literature:

- the use of embedded learning in place of in-service,
- teachers' autonomous use of time for professional development, and
- how teachers independently use their time in the absence of structured training.

The present study addresses each of these areas.

This inquiry will contribute to the understanding of teachers' ability to affect their own instruction and development. The tide of research has turned towards examining forms of learning that are embedded in the fulfillment of daily teaching responsibilities (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson and Orphanos, 2009; Desimone, 2009; Little 1982; Sandholtz, 2002; Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006). Emergent research has begun to direct attention toward the area of teachers' informal professional practice (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson & Orphanos, 2009; Desimone, 2009; Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006).

To add to this emerging field of research, this inquiry examined how teachers used time for independently-selected formal, informal, and embedded teacher activities. This work contributes to the body of research about embedded teacher learning, teachers' time use, and self-directed professional development. Scrutiny and evaluation of these topics served to clarify how teachers employed informal and embedded teacher activities as professional development mechanisms in the absence of frequent structured in-service.

### **Limitations**

This study examined teacher experiences at a single site and used a small participant pool of eight voluntary participants. The sample did not include any teachers who were not at the school for the duration of the academic years between 2006 and 2008. This study focuses on events that occurred from 2006 to 2008. All participants were able to provide data that were drawn from this full period of time.

This inquiry is a retrospective study, because participants were asked to recall details from experiences that occurred from August of 2006 through June of 2008. A number of factors including personal interpretations, connotative meanings, assigned values, present experience, and elapsed time limited teachers' ability to accurately recall past occurrences. This research is not generalizable. This study is not evaluative, as it does not seek to measure teachers' success, effectiveness, learning, growth, or development.

### **Researcher Identity**

During the time this study focuses on, I taught a comprehensive fourth grade class at Sapient Choice public Charter School. At the time of data collection, I taught fifth grade reading, language arts, and social studies. Being a teacher at SCPCS made me a party to

the experiences that this study explores. However, I positioned myself as an outsider for the purpose of the investigation.

### **Definition of Terms**

***Active learning***: an individual's involvement in reflective and interactive activities such as observing expert teachers, being observed (Garet et al., 2001; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998, as cited in Desimone, 2009), reviewing student work in relevant focus areas; and participation in discussions (Banilower & Shimkus, 2004; Borko, 2004; Carey & Frechtling, 1997; Darling-Hammond, 1997; Lieberman, 1996, as cited in Desimone, 2009).

***Adequate yearly progress (AYP)***: measures and compares schools in several subcategories that segregate students' performance data by race, ethnicity, and participation in the free and reduced lunch program, and attendance rates by school.

***Coherence***: the extent to which teacher learning is consistent with teachers' knowledge and beliefs of school, district, and state reforms, policies and curriculum (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, 1998; Elmore & Burney, 1997; Firestone, Mangin Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005; Fullan, 1993; Guskey, 1994; Little, 1982; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher, 2007; Rosenholtz, 1991, as cited in Desimone, 2009, p. 185).

***Collaboration***: the act of sharing information and experience; observing the practice of others; seeking advice, suggestions, and input from others; and participating in a two-way exchange that does not require requests be verbalized or immediately reciprocated (Supovitz, 2002).

***Collective knowledge building***: a deliberate, doctor/intern-like interaction for the express purpose of learning from the understandings, suggestions, mistakes, and experiences of others (Lampert & Graziani, 2009).

***Collective participation***: participation of teachers from the same school, grade, or department that leads to collaborative activity (Desimone, 2009).

***Content focus***: activities that focus on subject matter content or how students learn specific types of subject matter (Desimone, 2009, p. 185).

***Duration***: the span of time over which an activity is spread and the number of hours spent in the activity (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Fullan, 1993; Guskey, 1994; Supovitz & Turner, 2000, as cited in Desimone, 2009).

***Embedded professional development***: a natural function of the teachers' responsibilities or as part of their teaching and preparation process, and includes activities that are consistent with classroom practice, reflecting, mentoring, or even tasks as simple as studying or using a curriculum document (Desimone, 2009).

***In-service training***: a widely used, low cost professional learning opportunity that typically occurs within the school building (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006).

***Pedagogical content knowledge***: includes the concepts in a teacher's subject-area that are most appropriate for particular learners, how students learn certain concepts, prior knowledge, examples, and experiences (Shulman, 1986, as cited in Mis, 2008).

***Portraiture***: an emergent, open-ended form of phenomenological research that gathers and interprets multiple sources of data to explore and describe lived experiences in a narrative report, the portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

***Public charter school:*** publicly funded elementary or secondary schools that have been freed from some of the rules, regulations, and statutes that apply to other public schools, in exchange for some type of accountability for producing certain results, which are set forth in each charter school's charter (National Education Association, N.D.).

***Reflective thinking:*** the use of (self) monitoring as an important professional development tool in which teachers reflect on their instructional practices (Marzano, 2003).

## **Chapter 2: Review of Related Literature**

An understanding of relevant research has informed and guided this investigation. This literature review has five distinct sections that reflect the current research about professional development for teachers. The first section focuses on the relevance of time in professional development. The second section includes research that discusses characteristics of in-service models and examines common implementation and research-based recommendations for in-service. The third section focuses on the influences of collaboration, and explains the elements of teachers' collaboration that contribute to their learning. The fourth section places special emphasis on autonomy and presents emergent bodies of research that highlight how teachers' choices contribute to their learning and to the instructional process. The fifth section presents research about adult and teacher learning and emphasizes the way teachers learn. The chapter ends with an examination of the conceptual framework employed in this study.

### **The Relevance of Time**

As the focus on improving teacher quality increases, educational leaders must establish some level of accountability for the time that teachers devote to professional development activities. Since time is not a tangible object, one cannot technically govern it; however, we can manage how people use or respond to it. Therefore, time management is a paradoxical term that cloaks an investigation of what people do with available time (Claessens, Wendelien, van Eerde, Rutte, & Roe, 2004). Consequently, we really begin a discussion of effective time use when we speak of time management. We must expand the concept to include efforts to ensure that individuals have sufficient time to complete required tasks (Orpen, 1994; Slaven & Totterdell, 1993; Woolfolk &

Woolfolk, 1986). Teachers often have inadequate time to carry out all the duties of their positions (Friedler, Tan, Peer, & Shneiderman, 2008). The everyday demands of teachers' jobs do not afford them time to reflect upon their curriculum and pedagogical content knowledge (Friedler et al., 2008).

The 1994 essay, *Prisoners of Time*, by Cheryl M. Kane, discussed a so-called unspoken or rarely spoken rule known in the teaching community: "learn what you can in the time that is available" (p. 5). Her essay characterized time as, "learning's warden" (p. 5). Kane described one of the five pretenses sabotaging the educational system as the falsehood that educational leaders can transform schools without providing teachers with sufficient time to participate in professional development opportunities and revise their instructional techniques accordingly. The real concern should be whether the amount of time that we devote to educating is sufficient for accomplishing its goals.

Arjoon (2009) identified high-quality professional development as a key strategy for supporting struggling schools. She explained that allocating time in the school schedule for professional development allowed teachers to avoid scheduling conflicts. Fine (2009) explained that effective professional development must provide time for teachers' reflections. She also asserted that professional communities of practice hold staff accountable to the common intellectual mission that is inherent in the relationships within the learning environment (p. 163). Arjoon's study also revealed that the schools where teachers planned, collaborated, and cooperated saw pedagogical improvement and increased students' outcomes.

Much of the existing education research limited its discussion of time to its function as a means to describe recurring events and emphasize long-term over short-

term professional development. Existing research differentiated between contact hours and session events over an extended period without providing specific information about the duration of time invested or strategies for maximizing time (Baniower, et al., 2007; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002). Researchers have also examined the amount of time teachers devote to certification pursuits. However, a need exists for further research on how teachers use and manage time to guide their instructional practice. Many educators have taken their teacher-learning opportunities and restricted them to the time that they can afford to use.

### **In-service Models**

The current educational system consistently fails to provide opportunities for teachers to benefit from prescribed best practices (Little, 2003; Sandholtz, 2002). Subscribing to research-based implementation requires time to understand, master, implement, and revise their practice based upon lessons learned during professional development activities (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Sandholtz, 2002). Educational leaders first must begin to consider what they want to accomplish through professional development activities and then devise appropriate treatments that incorporate multiple best practices. Only then should we look at the clock and calendar for scheduling and pacing.

Traditional professional development rarely attends to the central concerns of teachers and does not directly affect their classroom practice (Sandholtz, 2002). The most common forms of teacher professional development in The United States are traditional in-service approaches (Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006). Sandholtz and Scribner discussed multiple limitations to traditional approaches. They cite minimal teacher

interaction, a lack of relationship to teachers' daily work, and a failure to affect classroom practice amongst the limitations. Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991); Lieberman and Miller (1990); and Richardson and Placier (as cited in Sandholtz & Scribner, 2006) noted that in-service typically consists of relatively short-term activities characterized by limited follow-up, minimal teacher interaction, lack of relation to teachers' daily work, and a negligible gain in knowledge. Sandholtz and Scribner conducted a four year case study that focused on a mid-sized school district that was undergoing significant professional development reform. They identified deficit-based in-service models' as failing to "acknowledge teachers as sources of knowledge and active participants in their own professional growth" (p. 1105).

Borman and Rachuba, (1999); Garet, et al. (1999); and Garet, et al. (2001) also identified the one-shot training or typical in-service as the most common type of teacher training. Borman and Rachuba (1999) looked at data from a congressionally mandated study of teachers in high poverty schools and compared their experiences to those as low poverty schools. The teachers in high poverty schools were offered few opportunities for contributing to the decisions about the types of learning they encountered. They also experienced in-services without being able to help determine the topics of their training. Garet et al. (2001) used data from the evaluation of the Eisenhower Professional Development Program to examine the relationship between an abbreviated version of the core features of professional development and teachers' self-reports of increases in knowledge and skills affecting their classroom practice. This study only attended to collective participation, content focus and active learning as core features of professional development. Teachers who participated in Eisenhower sponsored study group, network

or traditional in-service programs were surveyed in their study. Garet et al. (1999) also looked at the Eisenhower data as they argued that it was important to provide high-quality instruction that affords opportunities to deepen content and pedagogical knowledge. These authors contended that while in-service trainings were common, they were not the most beneficial form of teacher training.

Desimone, Smith, and Ueno (2006) quantitatively analyzed teacher surveys from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2000. They calculated risk ratios that were used to predict the likelihood that teachers' preparedness for specific content knowledge would affect their likelihood of pursuing content focused professional development. They presented findings that were consistent with much of the best practice literature. They called for sustained, content-focused professional development, perhaps the most important type of teacher education. Their findings revealed that the most prepared teachers were those who would pursue content specific training. These findings led them to conclude that it is important to scaffold teachers' learning opportunities so that they provide content specific knowledge correlated to teachers' levels of expertise. These conclusions confirm the importance of content-focused training. In fact, Desimone et al. conclude that numerous researchers considered "sustained content-focused in-service the most important type of teacher training" to affect instruction and positively affect student achievement (p. 182).

### **Influences of Collaboration**

Collaboration includes sharing ideas and receiving input from others. Through collaborative efforts, new teachers can borrow strategies, and veteran teachers can share insights that contribute to a stronger frame of instruction than one might accomplish

independently. Lampert and Graziani (2009) referred to a cross-disciplinary phenomenon of participation in learning communities. This collective knowledge-building process encourages the deliberate pursuit of information instead of ongoing participation in the collaboration phase. Collective knowledge building implies that once individuals have exchanged information, there must be a level of follow through where participants use or modify the new information for practical application.

Grisham, Berg, Jacobs, and Mathison (2002) used interviews, focus groups and surveys to collect data from teachers. They focused on reflective thinking, risk taking, collaboration, and continuous learning for teachers who graduated from the same professional development program. Grisham et al. found that certain core beliefs transferred in the culture of a school became part of the teachers' training. The core beliefs that emerged most often included collaboration, reflective teaching, risk-taking, and continuous learning (Grisham et al., 2002). This culture of training had an impact on the teachers fifteen years after the initial learning opportunity. Arjoon (2009) examined educators' attitudes toward professional development and tried to determine how effectively professional development impacted teachers' planning, instruction and pedagogy. Amongst the many findings is one that calls for fostering and sustaining a culture to collaboration amongst the staff. Collaboration was seen as a tool for improving pedagogical skill. Grisham et al.'s (2002) findings, along with those discussed by Arjoon (2009) indicate that teachers can assist in their colleagues' professional development through collaboration.

Finland, Norway, Denmark, Italy, and Japan's educational systems are organized to reflect the ideals behind this collaborative process (Shimahara, 1998; Wei, Andree, &

Darling-Hammond, 2009). Shimahara (1998) reviewed ethnographic data to compare American and Japanese perspectives on teacher practice. He defined the craft of knowledge as part of the context of reflective practice. The craft of knowledge requires reflection. Japanese teachers view the craft of knowledge as content knowledge that is “embedded in teacher generated experience and knowledge” (p. 452). Shimahara found that educational leaders in Japan embedded professional development into a social context that supports peer-based strategies like collaboration and reflection. This is because formal teacher preparation in Japan provides only a small portion of what teachers need to prepare for teaching. This caused teachers to turn to peer-based in-service education framed around three assumptions. Shimahara explained that it was assumed that teaching was a collaborative process and collaboration is the way to improve teaching; planning is a critical aspect of teaching and is a collaborative exercise; active engagement in peer participation is an essential element of teaching. The Japanese model of teacher learning focuses on improving instruction instead of the individual teachers’ credentials or perceived quality (Shimahara, 1998). Teachers are then responsible for generating a collective improvement and share responsibility for each other’s instructional improvement.

Professional development should be organized around collaborative problem solving and relate to individual needs (Hawley & Valli, 1999). Collaboration facilitates an environment that embraces innovations, breeds new ideas, and enriches the learning experience. Hawley and Valli explained that collaborative problem solving could occur when educators address issues of common concern as they work together to identify causes and potential solutions to problems (p. 139).

Banilower, et al. (2007) and Garet, et al. (1999) found that professional development activities that had a longer time span, a greater number of contact hours, and activities that encouraged collective participation contributed to teachers' instructional improvement. Both studies indicated that a longer time span led to more opportunities for situating learning within the classroom and focusing on specific content. As teachers focused on the content that they needed to implement, their attitudes toward instruction and perceptions of pedagogical preparedness improved.

Lampert and Graziani (2009) described ambitious teaching as the process of deliberately aiming to reach all kinds of students. Ambitious teaching reaches across ethnic, racial, class, and gender categories as teachers focus on fostering academic growth their students. Ambitious teachers targeted students who they perceived to be struggling and focused on instructional needs instead of social categories (Lampert & Graziani, 2009).

The pairing of ambitious teaching with collective knowledge building supports Lampert and Graziani's system of "self-improving" (p. 491). When teachers take independent action towards becoming better able to respond to the needs of their pupils, they have engaged in the pursuit of self-improvement. The processes of ambitious teaching and self-improvement, along with collective knowledge building, contribute to teachers' professional growth. Collaboration does not occur in isolation. It can frequently occur as a synthesis of instructional activities occurs.

A 2006 case study by The Abell Foundation examined and compared two successful charter schools in Baltimore, the Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) and The Crossroads School to other K-8 schools in the Baltimore Public School System

KIPP and Crossroads were the only two middle schools in Baltimore to make Adequate Yearly Progress in the 2005/2006 academic year (Abell Foundation, 2006). The Abell Foundation attributed part of the schools' successes to effective teacher-led professional development initiatives and collaborative efforts that built teachers' content knowledge and helped teachers better understand the process of student learning. The schools were comparable to each other in terms of teacher quality data. However they had more highly-qualified teachers than other K-8 schools in Baltimore. The number of highly qualified teachers was found to contribute to the teachers' ability to use autonomous planning situations to construct meaningful instruction.

### **Professional Autonomy**

A study by Neilson, Barry, and Staab (2008) used semi-structured focus group interviews to collect teachers' reflections about the process of change during a literacy initiative. The initiative took place under three key conditions: 1) limited, clearly defined learning goals, 2) availability of time and resources, and 3) training embedded in school and classroom situations. They found that as teachers became more student-focused, instead of curriculum-focused, they demonstrated increased collaboration with peers and elevated teacher autonomy (Neilson et al., 2008). Some teachers in this study exercised autonomy over their planning and instruction and had some degree of control over their own accountability. Collaborative planning led to teachers' developing a sense of efficacy and the ability to prioritize and manage instructional demands. These changes contributed to teachers exercising more autonomy over their instruction and planning.

In several studies, researchers found that teacher development was especially successful in bringing about increased student achievement when teachers had the

autonomy to determine the focus and nature of their training opportunities. Fine (2010) referred to Schoen and Fusarelli (2008), who studied teachers that held more autonomy over instructional content, assessments, textbook selection, and school policy. According to Fine, students at the school with more teacher autonomy outperformed most of their peers from other schools. These results were evident in their standardized test scores. Several researchers have agreed that teacher autonomy is important. They argued that “teachers should determine the shape and course of their own development” (Ball, 1996, p. 502 as cited in Mis). Mis (2008) in particular, explained that several adult learning theories contributed to the assertion that teachers need expanded autonomy over their training regimens.

### **Adult Learning**

Mezirow’s (1997) theory of transformative learning had three themes: experience, critical reflection, and rational discourse. Szemcsak (2011) contended that the full scope of one’s life experiences contributed to one’s critical reflections. Critical reflection upon life experiences involves questioning previously held assumptions. Deliberation on these experiences triggers new perspectives. New perspectives are the result of a rational conversation within one’s self about individual experiences and what one can glean from them.

Bandura’s (1977) theory of self-efficacy pointed to the influence of motivation and self-efficacy on the effectiveness of professional development. For example, a teacher’s belief that she is capable of completing difficult tasks has a strong influence on how much effort, persistence, and resilience she applies when facing challenges. Self-

efficacy theory is a valid perspective for interpreting teachers' investment and application toward their professional development and practice.

Lauffer (2010) explored the theory of metacognition, the awareness of one's knowledge and of how that knowledge is acquired. Lauffer combined his exploration of metacognition with an examination of social accountability, which attributes value to ideas and status when applied through collaborative and contextual means. Lauffer also discussed consequential metacognition, which deals with the impact of the teachers' learning on students' learning. Consequential metacognition focuses on teachers' intrinsic motivation, which builds on the recognition that students' learning depends on their own level of expertise and skill as an educator. According to Lauffer, metacognition is thoroughly applicable in students' and teachers' learning processes, and in teachers' instruction.

Mis (2008) explored the following questions while investigating how teachers use their common planning time to foster their professional learning within teams: What does an embedded professional development model look like in a middle school? What events take place during common planning time that foster professional growth? What role does collaboration play during common planning time in the cultivation of professional growth? Mis (2008), focused on how interdisciplinary teams used common planning time to foster their learning. However, there was no consideration of individuals' time use or personally constructed learning efforts. Also, Mis did not look at the full expanse of teachers' learning activities, and focused on organized planning time, instead of the full scope of time that was available to the teachers.

Mis (2008) found that teachers operated without an established or mandated agenda, and they could assess what areas their team needed to reflect on for each meeting and address those areas during that day's discussion. This flexibility gave teachers the autonomy, drive, and motivation to work to improve their instruction and their students' learning. Teachers need to own their individual professional development and continually work to sustain their professionalism, through ongoing training and continued educational endeavors. They must be vigilant to ensure that they maintain the ongoing process of professional development (Hargreaves, 2000).

Researchers and industry leaders have adopted a number of professional development models to meet teachers' professional needs, and have designed a number of models around the cognitive needs of teachers. These adult learning theories emphasize autonomy, critical reflection, and opportunities for feedback and follow-through (Boyle, Lamprianou, & Boyle, 2005; Friedman & Phillips, 2004; Guskey, 2002). Characteristics of adult learning theory are apparent in the best practices of teachers' professional development. Evidence of adult learning theory is important to ensure that professional development facilitates teachers' learning.

### **Teacher Learning**

Kyriakides, Creemers, and Antoniou (2009) established a dynamic model of effective teaching that incorporated factors that coincided with the core features of professional development. The model described activities such as questioning, teaching, modeling, management of time, cultivation of the learning environment, and classroom assessment as daily elements of teaching that are key elements of embedded learning. However, Desimone's (2009) examination of Kyriakide et al. and other's work concluded

that existing research had not appropriately explored embedded teacher learning as a valid form of professional development. Desimone explained that embedded teacher learning occurs in the daily fulfillment of teachers' responsibilities and can take place during a number of commonplace activities such as collaboration with colleagues, reflection upon instruction and practice, and mentoring or co-teaching.

Desimone (2009) identified the need to research teachers' myriad learning activities using a methodology that allows examination of nearly all learning experiences. Desimone also underscored the shared impact that structured learning and embedded learning have on teachers' instructional practice. Most teachers have experienced formal learning at various points in their credentialing, which often is a matter of on-going professional development. However, teachers also incorporate self-selected and embedded activities that contribute to their professional growth.

Whether participating in formal or informal learning, teachers have the opportunity to practice degrees of reflection. As teachers reflect, they take into consideration practice, experience, recently exchanged information, and students' needs. Together, formal, informal, and embedded learning cultivate strategies for instruction. Implementation of these strategies is not isolated. It incorporates both reflecting and collaboration.

Hammer and Schifter (2001) explored teacher inquiry as a form of professional development. They looked at teachers' ability to balance the intellectual demands of their classrooms while interpreting and responding to their students' strengths and needs. They found a link between how research, even personal research, impacted teachers' instructional decisions. Teachers' decisions to engage in Socratic discourse translated

into strategies for ensuring their students understood and applied the skills and strategies explored within the classroom setting. Hammer and Schifter also found that some teachers needed to focus specifically on their own instructional practice. They contended that, for some teachers, inquiry might not have been beneficial and may have detracted from their efforts in the classroom. The practice of inquiry is Socratic and requires time to develop the conditions for triggering discussion and engaging in dialogue. This is often not conducive to larger groups. Ideally, reflecting and writing about students and student learning assists teachers by making them more aware of various dimensions of their students' knowledge and reasoning.

Reflecting upon the various elements of the instructional design can help teachers determine how best to revise or improve their teaching strategies. This interactive occurrence represents how teachers navigate the intertwined application of each element of their experience. Marzano (2003) summarized reflective thinking by explaining that when teachers reflect on their instructional experiences and practices, they can create their own knowledge structures. Active learning is beneficial because teachers actually practice a particular instructional strategy that they have learned, sought, or developed (Arjoon, (2009).

Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) discussed what they call new standards for professional development. The new standards include formal and informal activities and interactions, which can improve the knowledge and skills of teachers. The new standards require teaching performed by “teachers who understand learning as well as teaching, who can address students’ needs as well as the demands of their disciplines, and who can create bridges between students’ experiences

and curriculum goals” (Darling-Hammond, 2005, p. 5, as cited in Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009).

Darling Hammond et al. (2009) identified action research, collaboration, reflective practice, and professional learning communities amongst the characteristics of the new standards for effective professional development. Murray (2010) conducted a national study to assess the implementation of these new standards, which framed active learning solidly in the existing research and tethered this research to the core features of professional development framework (Desimone, 2009). Murray (2010) looked at active learning that took four distinct forms: (a) observation of master teachers’ practices; (b) teachers practicing new approaches; (c) teachers planning lessons and discussing student work with colleagues (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; James & McCormick, 2009; Webster-Wright, 2009); and (d) teachers developing new approaches to teaching and learning. In Murray’s study, the five core features of professional development aided in the 1) design of the data collection instruments, 2) evaluation of the current and common practice, 3) design of the reform recommendations and 4) survey of the schools’ reformed practice.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The framework that shaped this portraiture drew from the work of Laura Desimone, a dominant voice in professional development research. A wealth of existing data outlines the best practices in professional development and articulates the importance of teacher autonomy, reflection, and collaboration for improving instructional practice. The framework that follows supports the recognition of the full scope of teachers’ learning experiences due to the conventional and innovative strategies

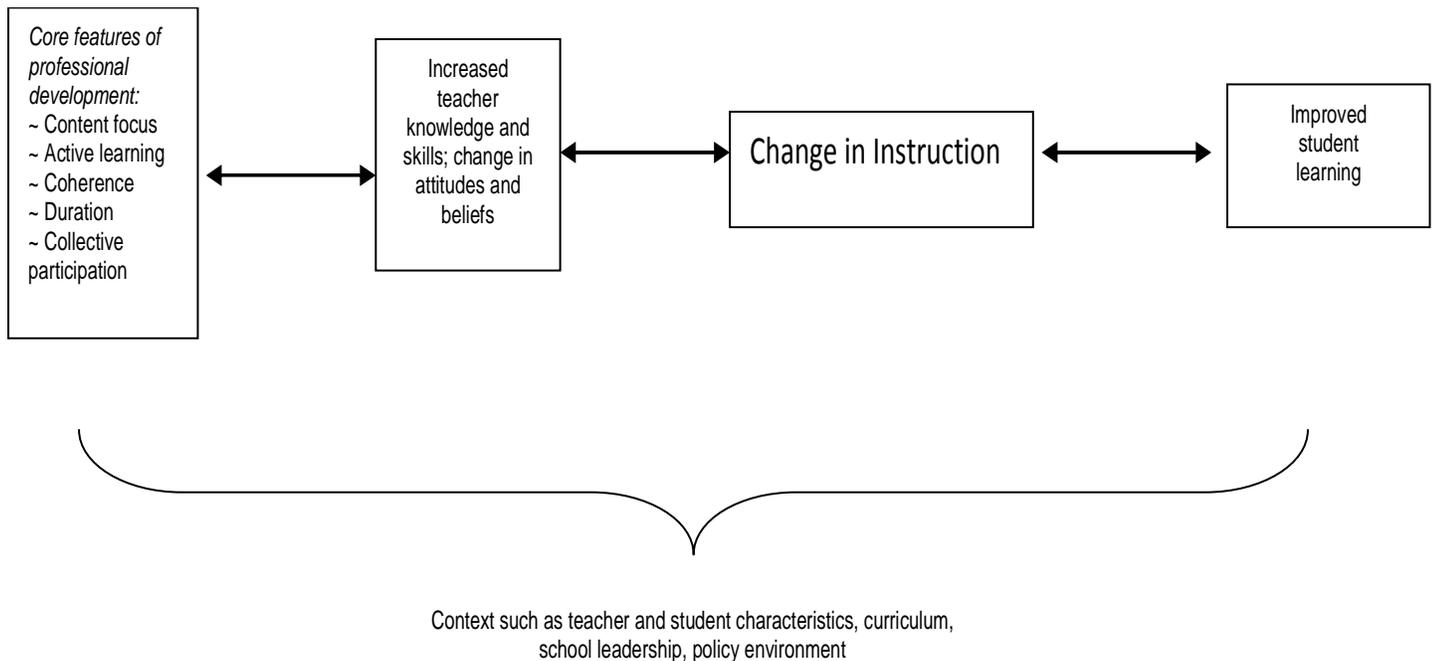
at work in teachers' learning. The features of this professional development framework informed the design of the interview and focus group questions that helped to answer;

- The primary research question: "What did the teachers in a newly created charter school do to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional structured in-service training?"

### **Core Features of Professional Development**

The core features of Desimone's (2009) conceptual framework for professional development are content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. They consist of research-based indicators that surface during data collection and have strong foundations in research (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Kennedy, 1998; Wilson & Berne, 1999). This study attends to the five core features of professional development, teachers increased knowledge and changes in instruction, which are the first three areas of the framework. This study did not address indications of student learning because attention is not given to issues of impact. While the present study did not focus upon measures of impact, I acknowledge that student learning impacts relates to the purpose of professional development. Figure 2.1 illustrates how instructional changes foster increased student learning and acknowledges the existence of a relationship between instructional change and improved student learning.

**Figure 2.1. Core Features of Desimone’s Professional Development Framework**



Note. “From Improving Impact Studies of Teachers’ Professional Development: Toward Better Conceptualizations and Measures,” by L. Desimone, 2009, *Educational Researcher*, 2009, 38, 3, 181. Copyright 2009, American Educational Research Association. Reprinted with permission.

Highly skilled teachers have a strong foundation in pedagogical and content knowledge (Baniflower, Heck, & Weiss, 2007; Buczynski & Hansen, 2009; Jeanpierre, Oberhauser, & Freeman, 2005; Supovitz & Turner, 2000). This foundation enables them to “anticipate how students may develop misconceptions (Sparks, 2001, p. 98). It also helps teachers to understand how to guide students’ conceptual understandings, which will help students to understand relationships between and among ideas and concepts. These are vital characteristics for preparing students to “apply and transfer knowledge” (Sparks, 2001, p. 98). This level of instructional understanding contributes to the

relevance of the new standards for professional development which are intended for developing teachers who have a strong understanding of students' learning.

Active learning involves teachers engaged in meaningful discussion, planning, and practice (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003). Such learning occurs when teachers are engaged in learning that provides opportunities for hands-on work that builds their knowledge of academic content and pedagogy (Borko, 2004; Buczynski & Hansen, 2009). Active learning connects teachers' needs and goals to their instructional practice.

According to Borko, Elliott, and Uchiyama (2001), a coherent professional development program is one that "is connected to student needs, teacher needs, school goals, the curriculum of the school, and state standards" (p. 971). For significant development in teacher practice and student learning, educational leaders must link professional learning activities to what teachers implement in their classrooms and schools (Birman, Desimone, Garet, & Porter, 2000; Firestone et al., 2005; Garet et al., 2001; Youngs & King, 2002). However, the duration of each activity cannot infringe upon other elements of the learning experience. Duration is measured by how long an activity extends over time. Teachers need professional development that is not short-lived (Yoon et al., 2007). It must extend over a significant time span and allow for multiple cycles of practice, feedback, and reflection (Blank & de las Alas, 2009). When teachers experience autonomy over their learning, they also experience more control over the amount of time that they devote to their learning and practice.

Collective participation is analogous to collaboration. School leaders can create productive working relationships within academic departments or grade levels, across them, or among teachers school-wide. Studies have found that when this occurs, the

benefits affect classroom instruction and student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Longitudinal studies also indicate that collective participation is effective in changing teacher behavior (Birman et al., 2000).

Influential policies and nationally released reports also identify with duration, coherence, collective participation, content focus, and active learning, which are the five core features of professional development (Desimone, 2009). The 2004 report, *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action*, which was released by the Teaching Commission, has influenced education with its findings (Desimone, 2009). The 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act is one example of an educational policy shaped, in part, by Desimone's framework. NCLB has been one of the most influential and overarching education policies in recent times. In its description of high quality professional development, NCLB clearly pointed to several of the features identified by Desimone (2009). The core features of professional development guided the analysis and data gathering process during this study.

### **Literature Summary**

The challenge of cultivating highly-qualified teachers and refining teacher professional development is an achievable goal. Professional development research presents the case that teachers' training must include time for collaboration, reflection, and classroom-based activities. The core features of Desimone's (2009) professional development framework addresses five elements of professional development that contribute to teacher learning: coherence, collective participation, content focus, duration and active learning. It also validates the need to acknowledge all types of teachers' learning activities; including those embedded in teachers' daily practice. Literature about

adult learning theories, autonomy, collaboration, reflection, and professional learning communities increasingly has acknowledged the individuality of teachers as learners. Teachers' self-regulation is powerful tool in their professional development (Hargreaves, 2003). However, a need remains for an investigation that explores how teachers elect to use their time to achieve on-going professional development. This study seeks to address this need by exploring how the teachers at one charter school used their time in the absence of frequent structured, school-based in-service training.

### **Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology**

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the design and methods used in this study. I follow with the rationale for using portraiture and for the data collection and analysis employed in this inquiry. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of validity, transferability, and ethical considerations. This study had one main research question. Focus group and interviews allowed participants to share information that answered the research question:

- **Research question:** What did the teachers in a newly created charter school do to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional structured in-service training?

To answer this question, I presented data using portraiture. The section below describes this unique research methodology and discusses its relevance to the present study.

#### **Portraiture**

Portraiture is a methodology that lends itself to addressing the empirical elements of the data, while capturing the human experience as described by study participants. In this study, I explored the manner in which teachers evaluated, defined, pursued, and executed their own professional development during a period when frequent, structured in-service opportunities were not available to them. Portraiture can provide positive, practical lessons in a study like the one presented here. It also allows for the presentation of thick descriptions (Geertz, 1974 as cited in Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), which include the participants' unique responses to colleagues and interactions with their challenges. Portraiture lets the context emerge through the presentation of personal vignettes. The teachers' descriptions of their self-proclaimed focus on students come to

life through the portraits shared in this dissertation. Portraiture blends art and science because it pairs systematic empirical description with aesthetic expression of human experiences and relationships (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Portraiture was a sound choice for this study because it incorporated elements that are real and relevant, and that eliminated many of the constraints of other research methods. The narratives inherent in portraiture made room to acknowledge the impact of the social and cultural context of the study. The portraiture methodology was useful for fully relating the intricacies and complexities of the participants' experiences, and best fits the level of detail, documentation, and analysis required for this study. I chose portraiture largely for its usefulness in presenting the data in context through an interpretive lens.

Portraiture produces a narrative that does not present an exact picture or reflection of the subject the researcher is studying. Instead, it produces an image of the "qualities of character" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) and of a revealed experiential history. Some elements of character and history exist in contrast to the self-image that participants hold. These portraits occasionally include interpretive realities that have flourished without ever being acknowledged or noticed before the portrait was complete (p. 4). The portraiture captures the dynamics of experience. Every experience comprises of a blending of positive and negative contributions. It is natural for participants to put their *best foot forward*, if you will. Choosing to participate in a study did not erase self-perception. However, it left the door open to interpretive analysis, which revealed the essence of the subjects, as well as the reality of their experiences.

In this study, portraiture served as a device for unraveling the yarn of the participants' personal experiences. Portraiture adapted the verbal exchange between the participants and researcher into a descriptive image that many can study and discuss. Portraiture also made room for the inclusion of the details and accessories of human experience in the data. I used it to incorporate elements of interaction, even when these elements were unexpected.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis described portraiture as the process of putting people in a time, place, and space that contributed to the context of the study. Context adds to our understanding of both the participants' and researcher's experiences in voice and action. As such, it allows the participants to self-analyze and describe both their thoughts and actions as in-depth or shallowly as they are compelled to do. The variance of richness between each of the participants' input adds depth to the collective portrait. Each participant contributed to the portrait until it was complete. When the image was complete the context, the image, and the data became rich. Portraiture left room for the nonverbal cues that occurred in the data collection and the external factors that influenced the context to ripen the image of the portrait.

### **Researcher Voice**

My familiarity with the setting of SCPCS fed my intuitive probing in the form of follow-up questions during the interviews. As an employee of SCPCS, I hold intimate knowledge of the challenges and beauty of participating in such a unique set of circumstances. Personal experience enabled me to recognize when participants had more to tell than they initially offered.

As an educator, I have thirteen years of teaching to inform my point of reference. Professional knowledge as an educator helped me recognize when linguistic terms needed clarification. The follow-up questions helped to ensure that the participants' implicit terminology would not be interpreted differently than it was intended. I reserved my space for voice for more intricate interpretation of commonalities within the data.

Portraiture incorporated my voice in many ways. My voice was used in my role as a witness and enabled me to express an outsider's perspective. I assumed the role of outsider as I was not present for or involved in many of the personal decisions and specific interactions that participants described. Each participant had a uniquely personal journey that occurred in a shared space that I also experienced. My existing in the shared space of SCPCS made me an insider. However, as an insider researcher, I interlaced my voice as interpreter throughout the research construct and the findings of the portraiture. In the dual role of researcher and party to the experience under investigation, my own experience had the potential to contribute to triangulation.

As an insider researcher, I was able to direct attention to the relevant but forgotten elements of shared experiences by using voice as preoccupation as the portrait was constructed. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described voice as preoccupation as the researcher's assumptions that shape the descriptions of personal observations. I believe that Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis were referring to the natural human tendency to instantaneously interpret everything that we observe. The varieties of voice that surface within portraiture are similar to the intonations that occur as one reads a story or participates in conversations. Portraiture served as a conversation that presented the

experiences of the participants along with the dynamics of the setting and nonverbal details that enhance one's understanding of the situational data.

The portraiture methodology allowed the researcher's voice to contribute to the organization, design, and aesthetics of the narrative image. This element of portraiture was truly appealing. Each phase of the documentation, interpretation, and analysis required in portraiture included a space for the voice of the researcher in a variety of ways that contributed to the essence of the narrative.

My interpretive lens incorporated what I heard, saw, and identified in supporting documentation. I began with a set of theoretical categories of interest prior to data collection. I tied each category to the underlying theoretical framework that informed the interview questions. I used the theoretical categories to organize participants' responses while simultaneously watching for themes to emerge. I also searched for spaces in the data where there was divergence from the anticipated categories and from the themes discovered in the data. This phenomenon is what Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) called the divergent voice. It has essentially allowed for the so-called, "exception to the rule" to be represented in the data analysis.

### **The Research Site**

Doral County School System was located in a Mid-Atlantic state in the United States of America. The district opened its first charter schools three years after the passing of the state law requiring the development of public charter schools. Sapient Choice Public Charter School (SCPCS) was one of three charter schools that opened in 2006. SCPCS was a small Kindergarten to fifth grade school when it opened. However, the school experienced a mid-year staff change, due to low enrollment. Also, upon

conclusion of the 2006-2007 academic year, several SCPCS teachers retired. These staff changes affected the size of the participant pool.

I selected SCPCS because its funding challenges prohibited the school from following the local district's guidelines for providing in-service for its teachers. Instead, the school administrator left teachers to develop their own approaches to fulfilling their instructional responsibilities for professional growth.

This study took place within a limited timeframe, the 2006-2008 academic school years, because the school offered only a few structured in-service opportunities during this timeframe. After those first two years of operation, multiple changes occurred that do not align with the focus of this study. In subsequent years, the school experienced significant principal turnover, and new administrators introduced more in-service opportunities. The new leadership brought new visions and priorities, which influenced the provision of structured in-service, as well.

### **The Research Sample**

I employed purposeful sampling in this study and selected the SCPCS site specifically because of its limited in-service trainings. Purposeful sampling also allowed for the establishment of a participant pool comprised of participants who could provide data for the specified time frame. This process set the stage for the collection of important information about what teachers faced with limited in-service training opportunities did with their time. The goal in applying purposeful sampling was to examine deliberately the case of this charter school for this study (Maxwell, 1996).

The participant pool consisted of one administrator and two teachers who no longer taught at the target charter school. One member of the participant pool was no

longer a classroom teacher and had another instructional capacity at the school. The remaining seven candidates continued to teach as classroom teachers at the school. The full pool of participants consisted of eleven people. However, only eight individuals chose to participate in this study. I interviewed all of the participants individually, twice. Six of the teacher-participants took part in a focus group. One teacher participant was called away from the focus group meeting at the last minute. The administrator was not a candidate for participation in the focus group, but provided a one-on-one interview. She also provided historical and legal documentation to contribute to the context of the study and to verify statements made within the data. I am not included in the sample pool of participants.

To recruit participants, I posted an advertisement for the study in a common area in the school and invited all eligible participants to participate in the study via email. However, all invitees were not required or expected to contribute. Each participant's portrait provided valuable insight and offered a combination of unique and shared experiences that hold valuable potential for this study. The mingling of individual with shared practices has produced unique portraits from each participant. Each teacher's portrait contributed to a relative mosaic of this charter school's community of practice. The triangulation of interviews, focus groups, and participant review is the determining factor in which of the participants' portraits was most emphasized. I placed the strongest emphasis on those who participated in all three phases of data collection.

## **Research Design**

The following section provides details about the types of data collected during the study, the methods of data collection and handling, and the process of data analysis. The chapter ends with a discussion of issues of validity.

**Data Collection.** To answer my established research questions, I collected data in several forms, including memoing, a focus group, and interviews. Below, I explain how each of these forms of data contributed to triangulation.

*Memos and field notes.* Memos captured my own thoughts and reflections throughout the investigation. Memoing enabled me to document personal growth and reflection, some of the physical interactions that correlated with the participants' responses and interactions, as well as variance and biases that began to surface through the data collection and analysis process. I recorded all memos on two digital recorders and transferred them to computer files.

Field notes provided increased flexibility for maintaining focus and continuity throughout the study. While ordinarily field notes capture what the researcher sees during data collection. I have used field notes to capture the nuances of the participants' actions, posture, emotions and gestures during their interviews. Gaps in information and description were minimal with field notes to supplement digital data collection. I recorded my field notes with a Livescribe pen, in a bound Livescribe journal, and later transferred the recordings to files on my computer. I purchased online, computerized data storage, which I used to facilitate later access to the files and allow the correlation of collected information.

*Interviews and focus groups.* A voice recorder provided accurate records of all data. After the focus group and each interview, I transcribed, reviewed, duplicated, rechecked, coded, and studied the transcriptions to ensure that the data constructed accurate portraits. Recordings facilitated a transfer of emotion; implied information, and deliberation that contribute to the spirit of the portrait.

I drafted the Interview Protocol (see Appendix A) based upon the core features of professional development (Desimone, 2009). I looked at features of professional development and designed it to gather information relevant to the themes of reflections, expectations, demands, learning, and time. Each category of questions related to the analytical framework and contributed to answering the research question.

During the interviews, I asked each teacher the same questions and, when needed, I asked clarifying questions to ensure the accuracy of the data. I scheduled all data collection encounters with the participants and began with the review and signing of the consent forms. All participants received a copy of their signed consent form, for their records.

The focus group session was one ninety-minute focus session that was both preceded and followed by shorter individual interviews. During the post focus group interviews, I asked follow-up questions about information that was shared during the focus group, which allowed participants the chance to ensure their stories were succinctly captured in the data. Participants also received opportunities during both interviews to expound upon their specific experiences and actions.

As an insider- researcher, I minimized my personal reflections in the data. Addressing my own experiences by writing memos from the perspective of

autobiographical voice helped me to resist the temptation to direct attention to my own experiences. My voice was reduced during the data collection process through careful and relevant questioning, which allowed participants to clarify their meaning and intent. I asked clarifying questions to reduce bias that can sometimes occur from avoidable researcher interpretation. The participants were fully capable of elaborating upon their meaning.

*Secondary data.* Throughout this study, I collected relevant information that informed the context of this charter school's daily operation, including documents that described the historical context, law, legal agreements, budgets, and contextual decisions. This level of data served to support the context portrayed in this study.

### **Data Analysis**

The core features of professional development, presented by Laura Desimone (2009), serve as the foundation of this data's analysis. It was used to capture whether the informal, teacher learning activities is comparable to formal teacher learning activities in evidencing the research based indicators of effective professional development. This framework was chosen because of its authors' recognition of the need to be able to compare many types of professional development, her specific notation that the core features can be identified even when present in non-formal learning situations. She specifically states that the critical features of the phenomena must be the focus of the investigation. These factors contributed to the framework's utility with both formal and non-formal forms of teacher learning. As I explored the types of activities teachers engaged in I was careful to consider similarities and differences when determining how those activities reflected the core features of professional development. I focused on

analyzing the participants' activities to understand if and how their activities reflected the key features of professional development prior to exploring evidence of coherence.

This framework exposed several emergent themes through multiple phases of analysis. Initially, I identified themes that surfaced as the result of the statements given and observation of the context. Data triangulation provided clarity on points of convergence and reconciled dissonant strains of word, experience, and occasional decisions to avoid specific details or expressions. All phases of analysis worked together to bring order to the data and to render a coherent interpretation of the participants in their context as they lived the experience of constructing meaning, determining direction, and managing demands, while pursuing goals without the support or distraction of frequent structured in-service.

**Using NVivo.** I transcribed all interviews and reviewed them three times for accuracy prior to importing them into NVivo. NVivo served as my data analysis tool for multiple phases of the process. NVivo was a useful instrument for storing collected documents; sorting through data; and managing, coding, organizing and analyzing the data. While completing the coding process, I collected any necessary corroborating data and stored it in NVivo. I also constructed links and memos within NVivo to pair data with other relevant information.

During the coding process, I tracked my thoughts, reflections, revelations, and correlative notes in memos and parenthetical notes. As an element of open coding, I first organized my data into nodes/ categories for coding based on the theoretical frameworks. After initial coding was complete and reviewed, I began axial coding. I established node/participant matrixes and summarized the data from the matrixes to begin my

construction of the narrative. I developed the narrative in fragments and selectively assembled it in search of evidence to explain the phenomenon in the theories used to construct the original nodes and categories.

Additionally, the hypothesis contributed to my recognition of merging themes. Reviewing the narratives contributed to the development of the memos on my findings. I compiled each of these summative matrix memos into tables to array the participants' responses and allow for a comparison of the participants' data and experiences. The comparative matrixes aided in uncovering themes in the data.

I then established theory-based nodes and sorted them into six themes. Those themes were broken into sub-categorical nodes that had some theoretical overlapping. For example, collaboration was a sub-node for both teacher learning and indicators of types of professional development. Therefore, collaboration was an element of multiple theoretical frameworks and the relevant data were coded in multiple node categories. This layered coding (coding in multiple nodes) contributed to the discovery of how theories' shared concepts added insight into the details of participants' experiences.

The interview questions served as the meaning units under the sub-nodes. I coded participants' responses based upon each interview question and the implied data that came from information revealed in the interview. At times, participant responses to one question provided vital data on another area altogether.

Providing a detailed presentation of these elements of the data facilitated the development of a conditional matrix. The conditional matrix displayed the patterns and relationships among the events, theories, and conditions present in this case. Each element of analysis contributed to answering the primary research question:

- **Primary research question:** What did the teachers in a newly created charter school do to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional structured in-service training?

### **Standards of Validity**

This section concludes the chapter by attending to issues of trustworthiness, reliability, and construct validity as discussed by Cresswell, (1998). In relation to these issues it is important to remind the reader that I taught at the charter school that serves as the site for this study but was not a participant in the study.

**Trustworthiness.** I collected the data in this study from esteemed colleagues. I had established a rapport with each of them prior to my decision to conduct this study. My ethical responsibilities included adhering to Internal Review Board (IRB) standards established by the university and the school district. The guidelines served to protect study participants from avoidable risks of harm. I worked faithfully at maintaining relationships based on honesty and trustworthiness. I also took specific steps to shield participants' privacy, using pseudonyms and cloaking identifying information to ensure I upheld their privacy and confidentiality. I respected my participants at all points during and after the study.

The participants in my study were committed to other responsibilities and were willing to participate. Participants were flexible and willing to schedule their interviews in consideration of each other's and my schedule. I was committed to ensuring that I respected their schedules and expressed my appreciation for their gracious cooperation in this study. I was also understanding and flexible when a participant needed to reschedule an interview or had to bow out of the group interview due to unexpected events. I also

looked specifically at means to provide ethical data collection, management and analysis. Throughout chapters 4, 5, and 6, I cited text from interview transcripts to capture the spirit of the participants' responses and the authenticity of their experiences in my findings. This effort was an attempt to ensure my own perspective and experiences did not contaminate the voice of the participants. I also memoed in order to release my thoughts from the experience of Sapien's start-up, which helped to keep my thoughts, separate from those of the participants. Other steps, discussed in other sections of this chapter, helped to ensure the validity of the data, which also contributed to reinforce issues of trustworthiness in this study.

**Triangulation.** Triangulation of the portraiture occurred in multiple patterns as I interlaced data from the focus group, the individual interviews, insider researcher knowledge, participant review, and input from the administrator to construct the portraiture. The staff members were receptive to participating in the study and were not informed of any background research or underpinning information that supported this investigation.

**Bias.** The design elements of this study's methodology include instances of researcher bias. Miles and Huberman (1994) identified three basic sources of researcher bias, which included the use of non-representative informants, generalizing from non-representative events, and drawing inference from non-representative processes (p. 264). The only non-representative informant included in the study was the administrator who was interviewed. The administrator provided valuable information that contributed to the quality of the portraiture by clarifying the context for this study. Typically, when using a non-representative participant, a researcher runs the risk of giving more weight due to the

response due to the individual's higher status. However, this interview served a different purpose than the other participants. Interviewing the administrator was necessary to clarify details about the school's context, to gain administrative details, and to clarify and corroborate some of the statements made by the teacher participants. Many teacher participants referred to the vision of the school. The administrator was the author of this vision and was able to offer insight about how her vision ultimately became essential to this school's staff.

Teachers' reflections, which created a virtually inevitable bias, were vital to this research. As such, the bias of revised perception may have influenced the data. As teachers reflected, some may have become tempted to report slightly different information than what actually occurred. However, I could do very little about this form of bias beyond triangulating data to control for this phenomenon. In this vein, I included anchor statements in some of the interview and focus group questions. The anchor statements helped to ground them in the reality of their current practice and to guide participants away from excessively flattering statements about their past practice.

### **Ethical Considerations**

At the time of this study, I worked at the school that is the focus of this portraiture and, as such, I had a number of issues to consider. As an insider, I have a working relationship with all of the participants. Some participants may have made their decision about whether to participate based upon our relationship. We occasionally engaged in informal dialogues about the context of the school when it first opened. Because I know each of the participants personally, they had concerns about how anonymity would apply. In anticipation of this concern, and in compliance with the IRB requirements, I provided

pseudonyms for the participants, the school, and in place of other identifying labels. I included a more detailed explanation of the application of anonymity in the data collection and analysis sections. Each participant received a pseudonym to ensure his or her anonymity.

Other trustworthy points are that I have not held any administrative or supervisory position at Sapient Choice Public Charter School. I reduced my voice during the data collection process through memoing. I took time to memo my own experiences as a starting point. Beginning in this way allowed me to release my own thoughts and reflections and freed my attention to focus upon the participants. My role as researcher required that I direct attention to the experiences of the participants.

### **Reliability and Construct Validity**

I accomplished construct validity through participant and memo reviews. I asked participants to review findings and report their views regarding the credibility and accuracy of results, interpretations, and portrayals. Additionally, I conducted a crosscheck of memos against the interview transcripts, interpretations, and portrayals in the findings to provide assurance that researcher voice had not overpowered the truth of the portraits. Employing participant and memo reviews, in conjunction with triangulation, reinforced reliability. Documentation of all variations and improvements to the design of the study contributed to transparency and validity of the study.

This portraiture specifically highlights the full scope of teacher learning opportunities. Allowing teachers to describe exactly how they have spent their time created an opportunity to collect a variety of data. This dissertation's data included some tasks that do not fit into the traditionally researched paradigms of professional learning.

Desimone (2009) suggested that ethnographic research also was appropriate for collecting information about the less structured forms of teachers' learning. This would be due to the ethnographic design allowing the treatment of all aspects of the teachers' activities that surface during the investigation. In ethnography, the details provided are not limited to traditional or structured forms of teachers' learning. Neither does it exclude them. Instead, I gave attention to any type of teacher learning activities that the participants presented. The portraiture methodology encompasses elements of phenomenological inquiry without being rooted in a specific philosophy and ethnography without requiring personal observation of the participants' behavior and actions. Portraiture fits this study as it incorporates traditions and values from phenomenology with techniques and standards from ethnography. Using either methodology separately would constrain the study since they do not individually combine empirical and aesthetic descriptions. These are needed to capture the retrospective narratives and insider researcher analysis aspects of the study.

Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) explained that portraiture is a qualitative research method that "blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism" so that the complexity of the human experience can be emphasized in ways that are ignored empirically and aesthetically using other methods (p. 4). Several researchers have used portraiture to present case studies in a way that emphasized the phenomena they investigated. Portraiture has the potential to incorporate the stories of participants into an image that presents the phenomena under investigation. Using portraiture allowed for observation and analysis that helped to develop deeper understandings of the participants' professional actions in the context of their lived experiences. This methodology leaves

room for discussion of elements that participants felt affected their pedagogy. I used the five key features of Desimone's (2009) professional development framework as a focus for conceptual coding and analysis of the transcripts of the focus group and interviews.

This chapter explained the design and methods used in this study and presented my rationale for using portraiture. This chapter also discussed standards of quality and ethical considerations. The next chapters present the resulting data in the form of portraits. Chapter 4 portrays narratives of individual participants, and in Chapter 5, I provide a comparative analysis of the data from the individual portraits. The data presented in the following chapters responds to the research question that guided this study.

## **Chapter 4: Presentation of Portraits**

On October 9, 2003, representatives from the state board of education presented Doral County's board of education with the details about the state's charter school law. Three years later, Doral County opened its first charter schools. The opening of charter schools in Doral County was, what the participants called, a pioneering experience.

This inquiry examined the various ways that teachers at a recently opened charter school used their time in the absence of frequent, structured in-service opportunities. The study followed seven educators from one charter school in Doral County and explored their lived experiences over the course of two academic years (2006 to 2008). As discussed in Chapter 2, this portrait was informed by a conceptual framework recommended by Laura Desimone (2009) for inquiry into teacher learning (p. 181). As detailed in Chapter 3, the framework also influenced the analytical methodology used to understand the events of the case. This chapter presents the experiences of the individual participants. Each participant shared how she responded to the challenges and circumstances that were common at Sapient Choice Public Charter School.

### **Sapient Choice Public Charter School**

The Doral County School System (DCSS) was one of the five largest school districts in the state. The school district's 18,000 employees served 198 schools after DCSS opened three charter schools in the 2006-2007 school year. Sapient Choice was one of these schools. Many people in the school district had the knowledge and authority to provide vital information and resources to SCPCS during its developmental phases. However, these individuals seemed unaware that Doral County had opened new charter schools.

The founding board of SCPCS chose to utilize the widely accepted and applauded Calvert School (Calvert) curriculum in place of the school district's program of study. The administrators of the Calvert School in Baltimore, Maryland developed this curriculum and, it has proved useful in a number of traditional, private, charter, and home school settings. The Doral County curriculum framework was a comprehensive document that outlined instructional details as minute as how much time to spend on each of the instructional activities that it defined for individual lessons. It included a pacing calendar that covered each day of instruction. Each element of the lesson including which stories to read, lesson activities to use, and cross curricular extensions to use was specified in the county framework. Teachers had to do little more than follow the script. There was no room for incorporating teachers' creativity, students' interests, or linking lessons to students' prior knowledge. Every instructional detail was scripted and planned.

Like other public charter schools in the system, Sapient Choice struggled with disparate budget allotments from the state and district. In response to these resource discrepancies, several charter school leaders in the area instigated legal action to obtain requisite funding allotments, and the decisions in these cases helped to reduce the budgetary gap between the public charter schools and non-charter public schools in the school district. Sapient Choice was not specifically involved in any of these lawsuits, however, its staff certainly benefitted from the resulting funding increases. The 2006 decision in *City Neighbors v. School Board*, for example, provided charter schools throughout the school district with additional resources for their students. For Sapient

Choice, these resources included laptop computers for teachers, mobile labs, instructional software, and desktop computers for students, .

Digital resources are invaluable for learning and teaching in a digital age. Prior to the decision in *City Neighbors v. School Board*, subscriptions to digital resources, such as Discovery Education (formerly, United Streaming) were only available to students attending traditional public schools. The charter schools in Doral County did not receive access because their charters deemed the provision of these resources the schools' responsibility. The inequities between public charter schools and non-charter public schools were numerous and created some significant challenges. Teachers at SCPCS faced a number of challenges due to these disparities in resources.

### **A Breathtaking View**

The building that housed Sapient Choice Public Charter School was neatly nestled amongst a line of majestic Poplar and Cypress trees. While driving up to the building, I noticed that the beautifully manicured drive bordered a lovely open space rich with trees and other greenery. It was easy to imagine children enjoying the courtyard during recess and gym; however, the area had picnic tables, but no equipment or apparatuses on which the students could play. The staff later revealed that they had hopes of purchasing a slide or swing set later in the year, but more pressing financial concerns would ultimately become the priority.

Beyond the curb appeal of the school, the office building seemed quite impressive. The mirrored windows appeared to cover every inch of the massive structure, and the sunlight glinted off the reflective surfaces. At the door to the building, a security system served to discourage unwanted visitors, and the parent who sat at the

receptionist's desk had to press a button to allow everyone that approached the building to enter. I waved hello and veered left to pass her station as I approached the elevators.

While waiting for the elevator, I noticed activity in the glass-encased room across from me. Four people were busy making calculated and purposeful movements. They unpacked boxes, organized posters, counted pencils, and cut out illustrations. I admired their mindfulness of the little people for whom they intended these items.

Kindergarteners would soon arrive and enjoy every detail that these teachers had put in place.

As I waited for the elevator, I looked around the area and took notice of another transparent space that was unoccupied and dark. The bell sounded and the elevator doors opened. As I wondered what the other space would become, the doors closed and the ride to the second floor began. When the elevator doors reopened, I realized that it made no difference if I turned right or left, because the elevator shaft was positioned in such a way that both directions led to the same place, the gallery of cubicles. With all of the attention devoted to the aesthetics of the entry space, this expanse of cubicles was a great disappointment.

The walls of the cubicles stopped three feet short of the ceiling. The spaces were very small and strongly resembled large closets. The space obviously was not constructed to teach elementary school students. Because the cubical classrooms had walls that did not go all the way up to the ceiling, I could hear everyone on the floor; and instead of doors, the "classrooms" had vertical blinds that dangled as you passed by them. Each classroom had two entries directly across from each other. Most of the classrooms were upstairs in an interior space and had no view of the windows. As a result, the beautifully

mirrored windows visible from outside of the building did not provide much sunlight to many of the classrooms. The windows were only on the exterior walls, where the guidance office was located.

I noticed more cubicles than were needed for classrooms, and several were unoccupied. The cubicles were small for classrooms, and the teachers did not have any space for learning-centers or creative seating arrangements. Since they had no extra room in the cubicles, the teachers' desks were located in an adjacent cubicle, where their other things were stored. Scurrying from one cubicle to another to get supplies or to put things away did not seem an efficient use of the teachers' time; however, teachers had no alternative to briefly leaving their classrooms full of children sporadically throughout the day. The cubicles had no student furniture, boards, or shelving when the teachers came to set up their classrooms, just a teachers' desk, a file cabinet, and bluish grey carpet.

The cafeteria also was a tight space with tile floors and it barely fit six lunch tables. The area had no kitchen, water, or noticeable ventilation, and appeared to be a simple space with tables and a single door that lead to the hallway. The space was so unaccommodating that the school could not hold its first staff meeting in it. Instead, the meeting took place in a much larger room that had what sounded like hollow floors. Someone later explained that the wiring underneath the floors of the larger room prohibited the school from using it as the cafeteria. When a technician of some sort passed by, he mentioned that the space had wiring that was perfect for accommodating large numbers of Internet users at once. If computers had been available, perhaps that may have proved a bright side to this awkward school arrangement.

At the initial staff meeting, teachers received boxes of their new curriculum materials. I was surprised to discover that those boxes only contained one copy of each Calvert School curriculum book, but these copies were the only textbooks the school would have for months.

The school had no computers and was awaiting the delivery of its copy machine. When the copier came, it was insufficient to handle the volume of copies that the teachers needed to make, as they had to create class sets of materials until the students' books arrived.

The first day of school was only days away. The administration gave the teachers a tour of the facility, and once they assigned grade-levels to rows of cubicles, they asked teachers to select a cubicle in the appropriate row and proceed with classroom preparations. Elsewhere in the DCSS, teachers took part in departmental meetings and reading workshops. The teachers at SCPCS did not receive notification of these activities.

### **Let School Begin**

On August 21, 2006, children across the Doral County school district began the bustle of what would soon become their daily routine: wake, stumble groggily to the sink, and begin their morning hygiene habits before breakfast. It would not take long for excitement to kick in as thoughts of meeting new teachers and seeing old friends again combined with the anticipation of lunch, recess, and gym. In the midst of this activity, phones in various homes began to ring. An automated call relayed the message, "The opening of Sapient Choice Public Charter School has been delayed." The 185 students registered to attend Sapient Choice Public Charter School had received a summer

extension. In fact, school at SCPCS did not begin until one full week later due to permit problems.

When class finally started at SCPCS, the students still had no books. In fact, several items were not available. For example, the office did not have a telephone, and the principal, Ms. Madison, had to use her personal mobile phone as the school's main line. The school still had no computers or audiovisual equipment, and a line extended from the copier throughout the day, as teachers prepared to teach without student workbooks. It was customary for elementary schools to reassign specialist to logistical tasks during the first week of school, so, teachers did not begin to notice that SCPCS had no music or gym teachers until week two.

### **Portraits of Charter School Educators**

Charter schools provided an option for parents that had not been available in Doral County prior to 2006. The opening of charter schools was a new experience accompanied by a unique set of challenges. I interviewed seven teachers from Sapient Choice Public Charter School for this study. They provided specific details about their experiences during the first two years of their tenure at SCPCS. In the sections that follow, I present a portrait of their experiences, including challenges, rewards, and lessons as they relayed them to me over the course of this inquiry.

**Janie.** Janie came to SCPCS armed with 21 years of teaching experience and a master's degree in elementary education. As the DCSS curriculum became more rigid, her satisfaction with teaching slowly faded. She found no flexibility in Doral County's curriculum framework, and she eventually decided to join Sapien Choice when it opened in 2006.

*A lot of startup problems.* Janie described the challenges the new school faced as it struggled to prepare for the first day of school:

[The] first year was very challenging because there were a lot of startup problems; we just didn't have a lot of supplies. We ended up starting a week late, later than the other public schools, because we were trying to get through legal things: occupancy permits, fire system regulations...just lots of things so that the school could open. I remember for the first few weeks, we didn't have desks, chairs, text books, school board. The governing board had to purchase long tables and folding chairs for the kids to work at. There were just a lot of things that traditionally you have when school starts. Copier machines...just what would be the basics...but we did without a lot of that in the beginning.

Janie had developed solid networks during her twenty years of experience. She and two other teachers previously had taught at another school with Dina Johnston, the founder of Sapien. Janie not only taught with the founder for seventeen years, but she also attended church with the president of the school's founding board.

Johnston designed the school to provide a college preparatory environment, so Janie looked forward to a year of working with talented and gifted (TAG) students. She explained that she expected to have students who had, "the mindset and work habits" to excel academically. In 2006, many of her students came to Sapien in search of academic rigor. Many parents had read the vision of the school, talked with the founder, and "wanted to put their kids in an accelerated, quality program."

In preparation for her students' arrival, Janie meticulously set up her classroom in one cubicle. Then, two days before school started, Ms. Madison informed her that a problem with permits meant that she could not use the room she had prepared. She had to take down the entire classroom and reassemble it in a new space. The support she received from her colleagues revealed the quality of the staff she had joined. Everybody came and put their stuff aside to help her set up her room. Janie talked about taking a stable environment and previously unnoticed many school code regulations for granted:

If every August or September, as a teacher, you walk into a school building that was always there, previously in operation... I just never realized all the fire codes and building codes and occupancy permits codes and just all the things that went into running a school. I guess subconsciously these things are in place, but when you're fighting to be able to even operate...you know, fighting to get those things in place with a whole new appreciation for it.

Janie's view of charter schools changed some time after Sapient opened its doors. Initially, recognition of the autonomy that charter schools offered teachers was exciting. The thought of holding captive an audience of deliberate learners was a joyful hope. However, the utopia rapidly vanished. In reality, the school was overrun with children who had social problems that were bigger than their desire and ability to focus on learning. She described the disappointment of realizing how parents were using the school:

My view has kind of gone back and forth. I believe in what the charter schools want to accomplish, and I was gung-ho and probably very starry-eyed about that in the beginning. But the longer I'm teaching at a charter school the more I see that the parents view it as an alternative school. [Parents say,] "My kids have been put out of their other school; I can bring them to the charter." You know; that kind of mentality that has been disheartening. I view teaching differently because I'm having to spend what I feel is too much time on things that are non-teaching issues like, behavior.

By the second year, Janie started seeing fewer TAG students and more students with poor work habits who were struggling socially and needed more academic help than rigor. She added, "... and we definitely started seeing a lot more kids dealing with behavioral problems." As the number of struggling students increased, the TAG population decreased.

I have to say, over the years, I've seen it decline because more so I think the first year, we're kind of 'under the radar' and a lot of the public didn't know that the charter school was academic. Once we became more visible, I think parents looked at [us] and thought the school more as an alternative school. So, if their kids were having problems, this was a place they could send them.

***Teaching and planning for mastery.*** Janie expected the structure of a school day to reflect constant teaching of core subjects, accented with physical education or music. However, she soon learned that the school faced a surreal challenge, "our first year, it was something as simple as physical education and music. We didn't have instructors." Nevertheless, Janie remained optimistic, because she anticipated, "being able to stay on a skill until the students had mastered it." In traditional public schools, teachers followed a very rigid calendar. It specified what educators should teach each week of the school year. Janie spoke of her time in the non-charter school, "We were encouraged to move on even if students had not mastered the skill being taught." The district's curriculum did not affect Janie's instructional priorities at Sapien because she was focused on teaching the children. While Janie taught for mastery, she also was deliberate in teaching the skills that would be tested. She described how she blended test focus with meeting students' needs:

When I first started teaching, every grade level got a scope and sequence curriculum document...what you were required to teach on your grade level for the entire year... It eventually became more rigid when they started the list of first quarter skills to be taught...second quarter and so on. That state curriculum gave

us a direction to go in. I didn't find that to be a hardship, because I knew that's what's required. I didn't lose sight of the policies because I know what I need to teach and I know my kids have to take the same standardized test as every other student ... but the needs of the students are going to take priority with me.

During her first year at SCPCS, Janie's expectations were high. She giggled as she said, "I thought we would just roll through the curriculum, because I was going to get some higher ability students; and I really thought that we would probably finish the curriculum early." However, she had an autistic student who forced her to "step up to the learning curve."

I really started off with the really great class. But I had one student in the class who was autistic, because that parent also had heard the vision for the charter school, but had interpreted it very differently. And she left the school where her child was getting all kinds of special-education services, and brought him to a place where he didn't have any of the specialists or help he was used to. But that was a big learning curve, when all the other struggles we were facing, as far as furniture and text books, then have an autistic child to plan for and just not having any support system for...I felt bad for him...I felt bad for me. I hadn't had any training in autism, and one scene stands out in my mind...always with this child.

One day, [I was] giving an oral quiz in social studies where they had to name the continents, and the entire time during the quiz he would holler out, "How do you spell Australia?" And then all the kids would start writing. He said, "How do you spell Antarctica?" And all the kids would start writing, and I was trying to tell him, "You can't call out. After the quiz is over I can come over and help you." He was just frustrated and in tears, and I was frustrated. He was calling out all the answers and so the kids were loving it. And you know, I think that's just, in a nutshell was what we were dealing with the first year, because we had parents from extreme ends of the spectrum who all brought their children to this charter school for miracles.

Janie had embraced the charter itself with the vision of Dina Johnston, the founder of SCPCS. She confirmed her awareness of the expectations that were outlined in the voluntary state curriculum for her grade level, which shaped her teaching. "I thought that we were expected to perform well, because in the charter, we had promised a bill of goods, and I really thought the county was expecting us to deliver on what we promised

we would do.” Her goals were to teach everything that was required. She wanted to take her students as far as their minds would go.

Janie was building an investment in her students. She wanted more than to see the school succeed. She wanted the children to excel and do more than they had been able to do before. From 2006 to 2008, Janie kept the same students under her watchful eye. She described the benefit of what she called looping:

The second year that we were open, the sixth graders were added, which was a wonderfully unique challenge because it gave me the opportunity to loop and I kept that same class for two years and I could say of those sixth graders I really watched them excel because it was great to be able to build on what they had already learned ... we could pick up where we left off. So, there wasn't a lot of re-teaching that had to be done... that class really went far in those two years.

***Something good teachers do.*** Janie's commitment to reflexivity came through as she explained, “Reflecting is definitely important. ...that's something that good teachers do on a daily basis. So reflecting is going to always help with your planning.” Janie reflected to determine if she needed to stay on a skill a little longer or re-introduce a skill in a different way. Reflection also helped her consider ways to supplement her lessons. She routinely looked back to understand whether the students got it. She would think about the questions students asked to determine whether it was time to “take this to another level.” Janie's reflexivity was an ongoing practice that seemed to happen intuitively.

At the end of the day, I look back over what was accomplished that day and may revamp or [teach] a little differently. So, we always tend to reflect on the lessons for the day. My reflection may have shown me that maybe an additional day was needed. So, my plans may have had to change.

Occasionally, her reflections were specifically student-focused. She would sometimes analyze students' progress and skills through reflection.

You just tend to think, “Okay this is a low ability group.” So, I may really have to water down this lesson; and then when you get into the lesson, you hear their thinking, and then you realize that even though a student might be a lower ability reader or lower ability student, that they are still good thinkers. They really can come up with some deep commentary. If you’re being honest with yourself, you may think, “I didn’t do a very good job on teaching that at all. That was a crappy lesson. I need to do this differently.” Reflection will help you to say, you know, “If I pull this in, this might bring this home to that child a little bit more.”

When we began to discuss in-service, Janie’s eyes glazed over. She remarked, “In-services ... we haven’t had that many since we’ve been part of the chartered school.” In years past, at other schools, Janie had participated in a number of in-services. She explained, “A lot of times, we were required to include what we had learned in our plans, because the principal may ask that we purposely add it in.”

According to Janie, the in-service opportunities offered at Sapient were “solely geared at how to implement the Calvert curriculum.” The curriculum company came to show the teachers how to implement their materials. However, Janie clarified, “We weren’t quite actually putting to practice what we knew from the [Calvert] in-services. Janie continued, “I can honestly say I found those to be the most tedious in-services I have ever [sat through] in my life.” As she looked across the room, she gazed at a bright red chart that was on the wall. It was her behavior chart. She commented, “The very best in-services were probably classroom management.”

Janie remembered in-services she attended as a new teacher and considered them much more beneficial than what she gets as an older teacher. Janie described herself as getting, “jaundiced” now, because the in-services cover things she has learned about for years during in-service opportunities.

Thinking back to her first year of teaching, she remembered participating in an in-service on teachers’ modeling behaviors. The training was about demonstrating the

behaviors teachers wanted to see in their students. Being careful to model for her students what she wanted to see. She told a story that she had heard years earlier:

There was a teacher who sent [a student] to another teacher's room to borrow a tape recorder, and the teacher went off on the student that came to class, "No, I'm not sending a tape recorder to Mr. So-and-So's class, because every time I send something there I don't get it back." But she had just blasted her class outside on sharing at recess and that always stuck with me.

*Learning from colleagues.* Janie recognized the utility of reflecting. She seemed to absorb information from a variety of sources. She still referred to information that she gathered from past in-services. However, Janie said that her best informal learning came from what she, "gleaned from [her] colleagues." She said, "I can honestly say I have learned something from every teacher I have ever worked with." Perhaps others need to recognize what she learned, "Your best resource in any school building is someone else who is already doing something well."

Janie collaborated with the principal, Ms. Madison, when she needed help. She explained, "[As] strange as this sounds, [I] collaborated more with [my] former colleagues." She spoke in reference to the school she left to join Sapien. It was her way of getting materials she needed. This collaboration was a strategic move, since charter school teachers received so few of the resources they needed. The first year was strange for Janie, because she started with a group of colleagues that rolled their sleeves up to help her move to another classroom at the drop of a hat. Then, when Ms. Madison had to reduce Sapien's staff, some teachers ended up leaving. She described the staff adjustments:

I lost the colleague I started with. A colleague got moved from another grade level into the fifth grade. She was not comfortable and was a brand new teacher fresh out of the college. As much as I tried to help her, she kind of had an "I

know what I'm doing" kind of mentality. It prevented me from really being able to collaborate [plans] the first year.

Janie admitted to collaborating in passing, but she was clearly planning without collaboration. "The first year, even up to now, we teachers discuss everything. We discuss the behavior problems. You may talk to a teacher who had that student prior to you." Occasionally, Janie talked to other teachers to find out more about the students she was receiving, in an effort to determine which parents were supportive or would help to correct behavioral situations. She and the others talked about teaching practices and anything serious that happened in the school. She defined how she saw collaboration, "I think teachers talk about everything. ... I think collaborating, if it's done correctly, really can make your job easier, because you may not need to reinvent the wheel."

Collaboration was a valuable resource for many teachers, including Janie. However, she did not link her collaboration directly to her planning process. Janie preferred to have conversations with her co-workers. She said they would talk about many things, and she would listen to their ideas and experiences, "gleaning" what she could.

Despite her opinion that "collaboration provides the best learning," Janie did most of her planning independently. She explained that she found it more beneficial to have a conversation with someone, "Having a conversation about concepts or experiences yielded more useful information than sitting with some books trying to hammer out a lesson with someone else." While the Internet and co-workers were sources of learning for Janie, she also spoke of a summer training that she decided to attend. It lasted all summer and focused on mentoring. She explained, "I see there's a real value in trying to train a new teacher in useful practices. So that was something deliberately undertook."

Being at the charter school provided some liberties that she had never enjoyed before; so, Janie explored independently selecting books to use in the classroom. One training that she found was about how to choose reading materials for students. She described the new experience of selecting books for her students after this training:

I definitely, on my own, went to find materials. I went to libraries, websites...to find, you know, what were recommended books for students of my grade level, and then I read the books myself. And I knew if I found them highly entertaining the students probably would too. A book that may have been recommended that I thought maybe the students wouldn't identify with as much; I was free to say that's not something I was going to choose to read.

The year was full of lessons for Janie. She constantly explored learning outside of what was specified in the curriculum. She spoke of the hidden curriculum and the invisible challenges. Both contributed to the challenge of teaching at the school, but helped her better understand her own experience. She explained:

I learned that I could teach a whole lot of stuff when you don't have any music, PE, or recess because that first year we had no specialists. My kids were getting a lot of material that year because I was able to make my class periods longer. I was able to have a 75-minute math period. And I think that's one of the reasons my fifth grade, that first year, really was as strong as they were because they had so much instructional time. Over time, though I did learn that it was important... if they didn't have those specialists and I needed to take them out for a break. The kids needed that break and they learned a lot of socialization skills during those times as well.

***Planning to succeed.*** Janie was intentional about tying her instructional planning to preparation. She expressed this commitment to planning and the generous time investment it often entailed when she stated, "I don't leave the school building until I know I have everything ready for the next day." Proper planning often required a lot of her personal time and money, and she noted the importance of being open to asking for help.

When I taught science, I stayed to make sure the trays were set up, so all materials they needed for the experiment were there...so I wasn't running around looking for some more materials, you know, the morning of... So, those kinds of things just take time.

According to Janie, she and the other teachers quickly realized that they did not have the resources to duplicate the success of The Calvert School. Eventually, Ms. Madison, the principal gave them the liberty of taking the components of the Calvert curriculum and implementing them in a manner that was best suited for their individual classes. This adjustment in the expectation that they would find success duplicating Calvert's approach proved a relief to Janie and the rest of the staff. As a result, she found it much easier to ensure that her students received the instruction that they needed.

Janie often recited a mantra in the back of her mind: "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." She was unsure of where she had first heard it, but she said little sayings like that kept her, "true to her purpose." She explained, "It reminds me that if I didn't do the things that I did that my students were going to be the ones to miss out." She elaborated, "I understood real early that I got a paycheck every two weeks, regardless. But my students got one shot at fifth grade ... if I didn't give them a quality experience they didn't get another chance."

Janie spent her personal time and money on lessons for children that in some cases needed more discipline than academic support. Janie summarized her position and purpose quite clearly:

I think my students are better off for the preparation that [I] make, and one thing I can say is they're generally happy about coming to school. They come in on the upbeat. I'm not a fool and I don't think that they are a little crazy about me ... I know that it's in large part that they know they are going to get a quality experience for the 75 minutes that they're here.

Janie enjoyed the time that the school's lack of in-services afforded her. She said, "[We] were free to use that time as we best saw fit ... there were things that needed to be done, which were benefitting the students." As far as Janie's planning was concerned, the most important subjects were math and reading. She called them *core subjects* and *tested content areas*. She shared two reasons for targeting these subjects, "[In] our mind, this was the first year that our school will be taking this test, and we wanted it to look like this plan...this charter school plan worked. It doesn't mean you taught to the test." Despite this denial, she was determined to make sure her students were prepared for the assessment.

*One shot at fifth grade.* Janie shared a story about a student, Peyton, from her first two years at Sapien. Peyton had a math phobia, and had convinced herself that "she just wasn't good at math." She hated math and historically, had not been very good at the subject. Janie explained that by the time Peyton made it to the fifth grade, "she just kind of resolved that that was the way it was." Janie could see when she checked Peyton's papers that she really was deficient in some of the basic math skills. She did not have a good handle on her multiplication facts or some of the key subtraction techniques.

Reflecting on her work, Janie realized that if she could build Peyton's confidence and get her stronger in "the basics," the student would begin experiencing some success in math. During her first year with Peyton, Janie began to see some progress in Peyton's mathematic abilities. By the second year, when Janie had her as a sixth grader, she saw Peyton make "some real gains in math."

Janie carefully reflected on Peyton's work. Janie admitted to studying Peyton's assignments looking for evidence that the student was close to finding success in math.

By the end of sixth grade, math was not Peyton’s favorite subject, but “she didn’t feel that intimidated by it” anymore. Janie’s concluding comments about Peyton’s story demonstrated her commitment to her students:

I think she’s about to graduate and I have to find her. That took a lot of time on my part. I could just think about how I was going to turn that around for her. And I definitely don’t like seeing females who count themselves out as far as math is concerned, because then they’re limiting themselves from a series of occupations. So, hopefully, it made a lifelong difference.

*It’s amazing how much you learn about yourself after you have to unpack your thinking.*

*~Janie Jones*

**Janet.** Janet was a seasoned teacher, who had spent twenty-three years teaching first grade. She had a master’s degree in Education and held an Advanced Professional Certificate, the highest level of certification for her jurisdiction. Janet's captured her excitement about teaching as she stated, "I love first grade a lot. I feel like it’s a really, really important grade. I want them to get a good start..." Janet had a level of commitment that was distinctive, as she spent 21 years at her last school and had been with SCPCS since the school first opened its doors.

Janet was a long-time resident of Doral County. She and Dina Johnston, the founder of the school, worked together for many years before the start of SCPCS. Before accepting a position with SCPCS, Janet found herself becoming frustrated with the restrictions the district placed on teachers in traditional public schools:

I felt like it wasn’t enjoyable to teach anymore; and when I heard about the whole public and charter school movement, I thought that might be a way to allow teachers to have more input into what they do and [use] more creativity and not as many restrictions...

Janet was interested when she found out that Dina was “looking into doing a public charter school.” She explained that she and Dina had spent years talking about

school alternatives. Janet would always tell Dina, “If you started a school, I would join you. Let me know.” Janet grinned and nodded her head affirmatively as she completed her statement, “I respect her tremendously, and I think that she has great vision.”

As she continued talking, her smile faded, and her brow furrowed. She lamented, “I was wanting...expecting things to be less restrictive in that the school and those in charge would respect my years of experience and allow me to meet the objectives in the best way that I saw fit.” She detailed how the traditional public school curriculum specified the objectives, activities, and time spent on each aspect of the lesson. Janet elaborated, “...in my old school, your writing activity only had to last 15 minutes, and if you didn’t move on to the next subject the principal would be very upset.” She shared that the principal and district representatives conducted several “walk-throughs” during the year. A walk-through was a random classroom visit to see where teachers were in the DCSS curriculum. Janet explained that these walk-throughs sometimes occurred multiple times in a week. After the walk-through, teacher received an appointment for follow-up if someone had determined that the instruction deviated from the district’s curriculum. Janet felt very restricted, “[like I] was going to be in trouble for not doing exactly what the book said... for bringing my different activities into the lesson.”

*A lot of difficulties.* According to Janet, teaching at a charter school offered more flexibility for creativity, but she also experienced a number of challenges. Like Janie, Janet commented that budgetary shortcomings were noticeable from the first day. Janet described the impact of not having basic office supplies. Janet explained, “I guess there were a lot of difficulties, problems with ordering things. So I had a lot of my own materials.” Twenty-one years of teaching was a great way to collect materials in

preparation for lean times. Janet only purchased things that she did not already have in her collection of vintage materials.

Janet also noted the challenges she and the other teachers faced with the Calvert curriculum “It took a while, even that first year, to get our curriculum,” said Janet, as she reflected on the new curriculum that she had once been excited about using. Having the sample books and lesson guides was helpful, but she had to make booklets for the students. The student books had not arrived by the start of the year. “That took a little while to get through problems with the ordering and such,” Janet said. The students’ books arrived midway through the second quarter. Regardless, Janet explained that her students were more important to her than the books, and that she held high hopes and big plans for her pupils.

*Planning for the children.* Originally, SCPCS was supposed to have two first grade classes. However, with the delayed opening, some parents withdrew their children and the classes ended up being smaller than expected. Principal Madison then decided to have one class of first-grade students and a first-second grade combination. The other first grade teacher was new to teaching, and Janet allowed her to do the one-two combination. The new teacher would take the higher-level first graders, who would be able to work on a second-grade level. Janet, meanwhile, would work with “average” and “the slightly below average” students. Janet recognized the level of investment that her decision would require.

I had to focus how I was going to teach... how I was best going to reach those that may be struggling. And a lot of times, though, the ones who were struggling were also very distractible; which, again, didn't help with the whole room situation...building situation.

Since there were no specials, the half an hour of physical education or music that most schools include in their daily schedule was spent teaching classroom subjects. Janet explained that the school put some creative provisions in place during that first year. Parents and volunteers came in on Fridays to take the children away, to allow the teachers to plan and prepare for two hours. Janet explained that she was fine without in-service and specials. It seemed to work for her.

I'd much rather stay in the building and prepare my lessons rather than have to go out or have somebody come in and have me sit through one workshop or another. It's just much better use of my time to get done...help me plan what I need to do with the children.

She outlined her process, "I sit down and plan for the week on Thursday, but then from day to day, I kind of will get the little pieces I need ready." Janet was careful to prepare everything in advance. "When I leave for the day, I want everything to be completely ready for the next day." First thing in the morning, Janet set warm-ups on the desks to make sure it was all ready for her arriving students. She would take a moment to review mentally what she was going to teach; and just before it was time for students to come through the door, she stole another peek at her plan book, glanced around, and made sure everything was ready. As soon as the students took their seats, she started the lesson.

In year two, during students' physical education or music classes, she would check their homework and notebooks, mark on the chart whether they had done their homework or not, and then put whatever copies they needed to take home that night into their book bags. Students who needed to make up a test or finish a project also would use that time to complete their work. She did not use the built-in planning time to plan, but rather to ensure that everything was in place to send the children home. She made sure

that she checked and packed up their papers, and that they had revised or completed their assignments.

[At] the end of the day, when they leave, I put up my new objectives for the day, you know, looking at what my plan book says, because I've already done that for the week...If it's Thursday, I'm meeting with Tracey to plan. Okay, well when I'm planning, I feel like the two most important things of the day are reading and math... they need to work on that kind of thing... My goals are always to try to get them as ready for second grade as I can...really get them comfortable with reading...really be able to write independently and express what they need to say in a way that people can understand it...really make sure that they have a sense of math...

When I asked Janet to tell me about her planning time, she explained that Sapiient provided her with more planning time than she had previously, "because we don't have a lot of meetings, and we don't have a lot of in-services and workshops." Janet did not mind having only a few in-services, "because I guess before I really had not got much from them." Not having frequent in-services left more time for Janet to "do what [she] needed to do." Janet was satisfied with the two-hour planning block on Fridays, very few meetings, and the lack of frequent in-services. It was the time she needed to plan special units like those that she prepared about ladybugs in order to expand the children's understanding of the insects' life cycle.

Each aspect of Janet's planning worked together to keep her focused on what her students needed and on teaching in ways that she thought were best for the children. Janet's planning was a time for her to reflect and determine what her students needed. She would, "do a little reflecting and then get all those other things" together for what she needed to accomplish.

Even though school dismissed at 2:00 pm daily, Janet stayed until 4:30 pm some days. "I stay until I get it done. I'm not even including like, grading their papers and

analyzing what we've done because...I usually bring [that work] home... So that's like another half an hour to an hour at home." Janet spent about ten hours weekly on planning, analyzing and grading students' work. Her time investment did not change much over her first two years at Sapien. In year one, she was spending more time looking for and creating materials for instruction. As time passed, the extra time was spent on analyzing students work and modifying her lessons to meet her students' needs.

*Collaborating and mentoring.* I asked Janet about how collaboration with her peers at Sapien compared to her experiences at other schools. She expressed a little frustration with the process, even though she acknowledged its value. She described her experience with collaboration:

Let me go back to my old school. We didn't do that a whole lot...Everybody kind of did their own stuff. Although, at my old school, I would every year have like a brand new teacher to work with, and then they'd last about two years, and then they'd leave. Then I'd get another new one. So, I would kind of have to mentor them every year so that was not really collaborative. It was more like a mentoring situation for planning. Here, I mean, while the first year everybody was, you know, new to our new school; but people have stayed, which is really nice. So, we are able to share more about [different things]... and we would all want to work together and plan together and that's kind of nice. And we get to sit down, and everybody has been here a while, so they bring their ideas; and it's not like, you know, me being the old one that has to tell everybody what they should be doing.

Being at Sapien allowed Janet a space to teach creatively, to recognize and respond appropriately to students' unique learning requirements. She participated in a professional community that evolved into a dynamic place of learning and growth. Janet's experience seemed to reflect a transitioning environment that facilitated self-evaluation as part of student service. Janet described how she learned a lot from collaborating with her peers:

Because I've been at this for a long time, the people I work with are a lot younger than me, or they have less experience than me in education. So, they're taking different kinds of classes, and they'll tell me, "Oh, well in our classes, we were talking about this, or we did this." And, you know, it might be something I haven't heard of before, and I'll say, "Oh that's great!" And so, I might try to, you know, take something that they've given me, which I enjoy hearing about; and then hopefully, I also bring something to them, because I have a lot of bags of tricks and things like that.

Janet was one who worked better when she had the flexibility to teach as she saw fit, and had limited constraints on her freedom in the classroom. She believed that such restrictions negatively affected her ability to give the students what they needed. She explained, "I don't think that the children get as much from me, or I get as much from them, when I'm restricted like that."

The restrictive curriculum from the district was too specific about how much time to spend on activities and how often teachers should go over each part of the lesson. Some aspects of the curriculum specified exactly what activities were required to accomplish the outlined goals. She shared her thoughts about using the county curriculum:

I felt I was made to do things that were wasting our time, and that took away from what I felt was really important to be focusing on...to give them more things to put in to my lesson. So, we were all kind of focused back in that time on silly things that are a waste of time. ...what I'm doing now and through this school has given me the time to focus on what was more important.

Janet's extensive teaching experience provided her with a heavy tool-kit full of ideas, strategies, and lessons from on-the-job learning. Her greatest relief in transitioning to a public charter school was regaining her autonomy. She felt competent and prepared to teach students, instead of regurgitating a strict curriculum. Having the flexibility to educate students was the reason she became a teacher. She elaborated:

I certainly knew what the voluntary state curriculum was and what was expected of children in first grade by the end of the year. ... But I felt like here I wasn't as under the watchful eye of whoever to make sure that I did it their way, as opposed to the way that might work best for me or my class at the time.

*Following Ms. Tubman.* Janet shared a story about a lesson that she had taught for many years. She developed it in response to a professional development activity she had attended through the Kennedy Center. Her voice seemed to bubble with excitement as she described it as a really a fun experience to do with the children. As part of the lesson, she prepared her room with stations, symbols, tools and activities to teach the children about the Underground Railroad. She began by introducing Harriett Tubman and her notable accomplishments. She would then tell the children that they were going to pretend as if they were on the Underground Railroad. As they experienced this trip, students would learn more about Harriett Tubman and all of her efforts to lead slaves to freedom.

Janet would turn off the lights and tell the students that runaway slaves had to travel at night so that people could not see them. Harriett Tubman learned to use the stars as her guide, and relied on the North Star to direct her path. Janet would display a poster showing the North Star, and the children would point to the star as they continued their "journey." Then, she would tell them, "Uh-oh, sometimes the clouds covered the stars," and explain that Harriet Tubman had to learn about other directional indicators, like moss, which always grew on the north side of trees. Janet provided a "tree" that allowed the children to feel for the moss and determine which direction would keep them moving north.

Janet then placed blue paper on the ground to represent water. Janet would tell the children, "Sometimes they did hear that the slaves escaped and they would come after

them with dogs to sniff. Harriett knew that they had to step through the water.” Janet explained to the students that the water caused the dogs to lose their scent, which made it possible for the runaway slaves to continue their journey. Janet and her students proceeded through all of the different stations she had developed. At the end, the students sang *Free at Last* together, to show that they had escaped slavery. Afterwards, she gave the children a paper to review the different stations and help them remember the lesson.

**Rhina.** Rhina was a biology major who had gained admission to pharmacy school; but she decided to become an educator instead, and started her first year of teaching at SCPCS in 2006. She had her provisional certification in elementary education (K-8), as a participant in the resident teacher program. While looking for a teaching position, Rhina had several interviews but was not inspired to accept a position until she came to SCPCS. She said that she wanted to do more than simply "fill a position." She was looking forward to joining, "a family," so that she could enjoy coming to work each day. After several interviews with many principals at a consortium, Sapient just seem like “the right fit.”

In SCPCS’s initial building, Rhina’s classroom was the size of four small cubicle spaces and could not accommodate twenty-four students. Excitement was high amongst the staff when the school changed location in its second year. The new building promised spacious rooms with walls that ran from the floor to the ceiling. Rhina stated, “It was old, and things like that, but it was more than what we had.” She and the other teachers finally had walls but there were other shortages to manage.

*Overwhelmed and anxious.* Rhina recalled, “I found myself and many of my colleagues having to buy their own supplies. The supplies that we were given at the beginning of the year; they’re pretty depleted before Thanksgiving.” Rhina spent a lot of money, as she purchased bulletin board paper and borders, pencils and pens, and everything that she thought she would need to be a successful teacher. She explained, “I was trying to anticipate what I could possibly need, because I had never done this before.”

As she prepared for her first day of school in the new building, Rhina was “extremely overwhelmed [and] anxious” as she worried about whether she would “be able to handle it” as a biology major who had been on track for pharmacy school. However, after her first day of teaching with a well-planned lesson, Rhina was reassured. She realized, “as long as I stick to the plan, it’s not so hard after all.”

She decided that her experience at Sapien was more rewarding than challenging, because she could see the children’s growth as the year progressed. They entered her classroom as third graders in fourth grade uniforms, but by the end of the year, they were ready for the fifth grade. She elaborated:

I believe that I see them coming to my classroom as small children. When they leave, they know a little bit more. ... I think it’s a really big accomplishment, because some of these things are life skills that these children will be using, you know, into adulthood.”

A significant challenge was “behavior and consistent discipline” for children who made multiple offenses. She also mentioned that the students did not uphold the code of conduct.

*It’s not just me.* Once the children left for home, in the afternoons, Rhina planned and prepared for the coming weeks. Planning in year one included a significant

amount of collaboration. She and her teammate had a continuous dialog about their daily lessons. Rhina used to plan after school for one hour, once a week, on Thursdays, with another, more experienced teacher. Since the school was not departmentalized during the first two years, Rhina and her teammate would take turns planning a month at a time. They shared plans to make sure they were doing the same things at the same time and staying on the same course.

As she collaborated, Rhina came to some basic conclusions about the cooperative process. She understood that when you collaborate with someone, you have a purpose for being there, to discuss the job. Her moments of clarity came as she heard other people going through situations that were similar to those she had faced. Everyone had days that lessons deviated from what an established plan. She said she realized, “Oh, it’s not just me! I’m not the only one who, you know, didn’t really meet that goal or that objective the day that I planned on meeting [it].” She learned that collaboration helped her to embrace that promise of getting it right tomorrow.

When Rhina planned during her initial year, she tried to use every book she could find as a resource for writing lesson plans. She used a plan book and a grade book to write in the assignments that she planned to grade. Rhina was methodical in her planning. She started by identifying the objectives and designing the lesson. Then she would begin to assemble all of the materials, books, and manipulatives that she would need to execute her lessons. Once she was “able to get [her] hands on a computer and a projector,” and learned that she had “access to this great website that has all of [this] information,” Rhina sometimes used Discovery Education to take the children on “virtual field trips.”

*Planning: My own research.* “I spent a lot of time doing my own research,” Rhina stated confidently. She described her research activities as time spent at home on the Internet looking for instructional strategies, ways to address specific modalities or learning styles, center ideas, and lessons that would complement the suggested curriculum. She explained, “I wanted to be the best teacher that I could possibly be. [If] I had a spare moment, I was always, you know, researching to find out ways to improve my craft.”

Rhina would plan two hours daily while at work and then continue at home. She would take materials home to refine her plans. She recalled the weekends, “I would say I never walked out of the door with the intention of actually going home and not doing any work.” However, year two was a little different. She moved into preparing weekly plans that were more flexible and less dense. As the year progressed, she learned that “you can’t put everything into one day ... it’s okay, to stretch things out.” A two-hour block of time was also available every Friday, when volunteers came to do activities with the children, while the teachers used the time to plan. Rhina used the time to create lessons that fostered background knowledge for her students.

My first year teaching we did a --it was a lesson plan on spiders. And it was a unit. And it was actually to introduce a story that we were going to be reading. I cannot think of the name of the story but the children had an opportunity to look at pictures of spiders. We had an opportunity to create spiders. We had an opportunity to write a small play, you know, I create a skit and we created a story, before we actually got into reading the story. This was all to prepare them for the story.

Initially, Rhina had a problem with over planning, due to time management issues. She thought that an hour was a long time, and would look over her lesson plan and ask herself, “Is this really going to last me all of this time?” She eventually realized

that she did not have enough time to do everything she had planned. Her anxiety over having to rush to close her lessons prematurely and continue them the next day motivated her to learn how to manage her time better. She explained:

I don't want to rush to things or make it seem like I'm just giving busy work. So, I tried to, you know, plan within reason...you know, think about the class that I have in front of me and, you know, the amount of work or the activities that I think that they can complete in the amount of time that I have with them.

Eventually, she could cover skills in a logical order without rushing, and knew her students' level of understanding before she started. Reflecting was her primary tool for accomplishing her goals. She declared, "I absolutely learned something, especially while teaching. You know, it's good to have plans, but I also quickly learned that plans can go out of the window if student[s] aren't where you think they should be." She remembered how it felt when she saw her lesson moving in a direction that wasn't planned, "at first it was panic mode, but then, eventually, it turned...and so...okay, well, you know, we can't move forward until we, you know, deal with this issue." Rhina assessed her evolution as a teacher:

I think that over time you become a better teacher. I think that I've learned from mistakes that I've made in the past, whether it was in my lesson planning, in the delivery of my lesson, in my classroom management...I'm always looking to, you know, make changes and make improvements.

Rhina evolved from time consuming planning to a more refined method of "tweaking" her plans, which involved referring to past lessons and adjusting them for the needs of her current class. She explained, "I'm actually sitting and brainstorming about what I really need to do, it doesn't take up as much of my time as it did in the beginning."

***Making changes and improvements.*** The chairperson for second grade at SCPCS reinforced and modeled the importance of reflecting on your lessons. Reflecting

led to Rhina's recognition of students' individual challenges, and helped her realize when she had not explained a particular concept clearly. When she recognized her error, she would go back and clarify things for the students.

She scrutinized every paper because she felt "it was pointless to write lesson plans for weeks in advance if [she] wasn't actually going to be teaching those things...So, it was very important for [her] to go through their work." She felt that the time she invested in reflecting on and scrutinizing her students' work set the stage for a smooth transition to the next skill. Reflecting also allowed her to plan lessons that addressed areas of need and helped her learn to deliver the lesson by placing more emphasis on the areas of weakness.

When Rhina started teaching, she made it a point to grade every assignment that crossed her desk. She quickly found out it was a tremendous amount of work. Managing her grading was an element of her learning on the job. However, she saw value in grading so much work, "[It] actually allowed me to see what students really didn't understand ... [It] allowed me to tailor smaller lesson plans for students to help them out." She continued describing her use of reflection:

I think I analyze student's work daily, whether they're working independently, in small group, at the board, working with a partner...I mean, when we're just having discussions in the classroom, I'm listening in order to hear that they are understanding and when I'm going around the room, I'm looking to see that they're understanding.

Having a very active class, she quickly learned how to design lessons that let them learn by doing things. Rhina integrated tossing a ball around the room into her teaching and it motivated the student to know their multiplication facts. Her students would practice in their spare time, just because they expected to play this game. They

never knew when they wanted to be ready.” She described the multiplication game she created to draw in the students:

I’ll hold up a flashcard, you have to give me the answer in five seconds, toss the ball to somebody else, flashcard-- toss. And they really looked forward to it, because it was something other than picking up a pencil and writing. It gave them a chance to move around, and they didn’t want to get out, so, they were studying at home without me even having to tell them.

Rhina was creative, and she sometimes thought the Calvert in-services were beneficial. In the first year of using the Calvert School curriculum, representatives from the Calvert School worked with teachers from the various grade levels to show them how to use the curriculum properly. However, Rhina stated, “I don’t quite recall that many visits.” Rhina described the Calvert in-services as informational sessions designed to foster familiarity with the curriculum. Calvert trainers came about every three or four months, and in the first year, Rhina said, “I don’t think we had any county training.” Now that she regularly attends Doral County’s math meetings, Rhina said, “I don’t feel as though they need to be as long as they are. ... I feel like it throws [us] off when I’m out.”

Rhina was taking classes at the local university as she participated in the resident teacher program with about one hundred other teachers. The program was an alternative route to obtain a teaching certification and provided opportunities for speaking with teachers from other schools. In addition to focusing on reading and classroom management, the resident teacher program included cohort meetings and classroom experience via summer school teaching. Participants observed and participated in planning sessions before their two weeks of teaching summer school lessons. Rhina recalled, “The thing that stuck with me with that experience was that it actually gave me

my first real taste of being in the classroom, and it also let me know that busy children will control themselves.”

She found herself implementing many things introduced through the resident teacher program, like small groups. Even though small group lessons were not required at Sapien, Rhina used them to focus on students who were struggling. She monitored her students and reflected on the interactions in the lessons to determine who would benefit from added support.

She described how she reflected to analyze herself, “I always take time to reflect, because it allows me to re-teach in a better way. And I make sure that I make specific notes about where my area of fault was.” Rhina based her expectations on things she heard from others in the resident teacher program. She talked about some of the discussions:

I could hear their stories about pacing and having to be on certain days and [a] certain week at specific times, and I knew that a charter school had some type of autonomy to not stick to such strict guidelines or strict parameters. And I thought that when coming to a charter school, that it would be completely different. You wouldn’t feel as much pressure [about] not being on week six, day two...you know, when you were supposed to be.

Rhina’s initial goals were, quite simply, not to fail. Failure would have meant having her students finish the day not understanding the lessons she had taught. Rhina focused on making sure she accomplished her objectives each day and demonstrated fairness and consistency.

Her expectations were the essential elements for classroom success. She wanted students to give their undivided attention and to have supplies. She wanted to be able to “articulate to the children in a way they could understand the lesson and learn in it in

their own [modality].” She described how environmental pressures affected her instructional design:

I felt like I was expected to perform very well, because we did not open up on time the first year, because this charter school thing was new in the county, and because we weren’t using county curriculum. I feel like we had to show why our school should be open.

Rhina, of course, wanted her students to do well on the State Standardized Assessment. She also clarified that the test was not a reflection of everything she taught, even though that seemed to be the common perception. When asked about the district’s guidelines, Rhina replied:

I think it impacted my priorities, because I wanted to make sure that my children [were] successful on the test, but I do not teach to the test ... I think that the test, in a sense...it made me aware that there are things that I needed to teach, and I wanted to make sure that I did so... I believe that it’s a bonus, because it actually allows us to shine in our own way, by letting people know that we’re not using the same curriculum that you all are using, but yet our children are still meeting and/or exceeding some of the goals that were set for us.

Taking the same assessment that other schools were taking led Rhina to check the DCSS curriculum. She found that some of the things she taught did not fall into the same order of teaching as the district. Even though over time, Rhina’s instruction lined up with the district’s curriculum goals. She explained, “I did use the county curriculum, the standards, the assessment limits;” however, if she felt that she would have to rush her students, “[she] just wouldn’t do it.” While she admitted that, on occasion, she was unable to cover a particular skill, her rationale was reasonable. Focusing on attending to learning deficits and skill mastery takes time away from covering new lessons. Rhina explained why she felt validated in her decisions:

I like to teach things in a way that, I guess, makes sense... [We] do end up lining up in the end, because if I go through and I check off what we’ve covered, by the end, just about all of those goals or skills, they have checks beside them.

*Learning and adjusting.* Rhina had started teaching second grade, and had mentally prepared herself for it, when principal switched her to a fourth grade classroom after some teachers were reassigned another school, due to low enrollment. She lamented, “I won’t lie. I was upset, because how do I switch my brain from teaching second graders to teaching fourth graders. And initially, when I got my fourth grade class, I found it very hard to adjust.” Since she had a large number of students in the fourth grade who were below grade level, she was able to use much of what she had prepared for the younger students to support them. She gave an example of how her reflections and flexible instruction work together:

There was a student in my first...in my classroom, who had an IEP, and the student was a very...he’s [a] tactile learner. You know, he needed to learn through touching, manipulating, moving things around. And I believe we were working on place values, and we had used place value models. I made these nice pockets with cups, and we were putting straws, and everybody was getting it. And I thought that the lesson was going wonderful, and then when I sat back and I reflected on it, this one student, you know, he was still having difficulty with identifying the proper place values...knowing which one was the ones, tens, the hundreds, and so on. So, what I did was, being a first year teacher, I pulled the desk to the side and I created little sections of tape where, you know, we marked off all the way to the, I believe, the hundred thousand place value. And I created little smaller bundles of like straws and we sat there. ...and we actually sat there, and we worked with it. I didn’t have a chance to do it with him during the day, but it just so happened that next day his mother was late. And I said, “Well, since we’re sitting here...” [He] really seemed to get it at that point.

Rhina explained, “I guess I am a linguistic learner, I think that it’s great for some, [but] it’s not for all.” Rhina talked about the relevance of students’ learning styles in her instruction, “[In] order to be a good teacher, you need to be willing to adjust your style ... in order to help a child where they need help.” Her philosophy was that to do your best as a teacher, you must be flexible to ensure that each child can benefit from your teaching.

*The light bulb went off.* Rhina shared a story from her first year at Sapien that taught her a lasting lesson. Soon after transitioning to teaching fourth grade, Rhina was introducing multiplication skills using a lesson from the Calvert School curriculum. She had her teaching guide in front of her, because she felt more comfortable having it at hand to reference during the lesson. Rhina would read the teacher-text to be sure that she was conveying the correct message. She was not yet secure enough to stray from what was inside of the book and did not get too far off track.

As she told the story, she was careful to clarify, “I know my multiplication facts and I’ve known them for a long time; but the way that the lesson was presented in the curriculum was a clap, clap, snap, snap—it was very confusing.” So, when it was time for the lesson to start they were snapping and clapping, and “it just sounded awful and terrible and I was just looking like, this was not how I thought that it would be.”

As it happened, the founder of the school, Dina Johnston, was walking past her classroom. Dina stopped in the doorway because she heard the noise and wanted to see what they were doing. Rhina recalled, “I was trying to teach something [as] simple as what’s two times three, and we were snapping and clapping and the children couldn’t get it together, and the founder just called me over to the door.” She could see that Rhina’s lesson was not going well.

Dina said, “Rhina, what’s the skill?”

Rhina replied, “Well, I’m just trying to introduce basic multiplication by something from zero to six that day.”

Dina asked what that had to do with the snapping and the clapping.

As Rhina’s retold the story, in what was now her fifth year of teaching, she still could not make sense of the lesson. Rhina recounted how she stuttered and struggled to articulate the logic behind the claps and snaps, “The clap should... the snap should... I

can't even explain it because it was so confusing." However, Dina's reply was simple, but profound, as she said to Rhina, "If you know how to multiply, just teach it. Just teach it. Just because it's in the book, doesn't mean that you have to do it." Rhina said that advice provided clarity, "[The] light bulb went off, and I learned to set my curriculum to the side." When she knew an easier way to convey the lesson, she felt more comfortable deviating from the curriculum, "I would go with the way that I knew how to do it, rather than trying to teach something in a way that I didn't feel comfortable with..." She learned that if she was not confident and clear on what she was trying to teach, then she could not expect her class to retain anything meaningful.

For Rhina, teaching became much easier over time. Her final statement summarized her learning through her charter school experience, "I realized, at that point, that doing everything according to the curriculum isn't necessarily always the right thing to do."

**Meg.** Meg had a bachelor's degree in education, and was in the early stages of her career when she started teaching at Sapient Choice. Meg had one year of teaching experience in an out-of-state private school when Ms. Madison hired her only five days before the academic year began.

Meg was in a unique situation. She had one full year of private school co-teaching experience. When she walked into Sapient, she did not know anyone there. The only familiar face was that of the person who hired her, the principal. She saw her job as opportunity, because she had just come from Pennsylvania, participated in an interview, and received an offer from Ms. Madison. She started five days later.

She explained, “My initial experience was a little scary. I was expecting a school building, and we were not in a typical school building.” Her first year teaching in her own classroom was intimidating, because, as she said, “I had a bunch of different surroundings that kind of made it difficult.” The school only had the half walls, which did not muffle sound; instead of regular desks that year, students sat at tables; and the overall space in the building was inadequate. Meg’s rose-colored glasses gave her a glowing outlook from the start; however, she described the shock of her reality:

I was coming down here and starting a job super fast and didn't really...I didn't really know what to expect. But after I met with the principal, and after I had my [orientation] training in the county, I was expecting...It's going to sound silly, but I was expecting everything to be perfect. I was expecting to walk in and have my curriculum the first day. I was expecting to have a good-sized classroom, where I would be able to manipulate it to have centers and different areas of learning. And I was expecting to have children the first day of school, which ended up being delayed because of building issues.

Meg actually received her job through a Doral County job fair. After sitting through a couple of different interviews on that day, she ended up with the principal of Sapient Choice Public Charter School. Soon after the interview began, Meg heard the words, “You’re hired,” and was told to be ready to work five days later. Meg had never been more than an hour away from home in her life, and told to move within five days. She was moving two and a half hours away, and she had no housing. She felt like a deer in the headlights. She felt shocked, nervous, and anxious, because of everything that was happening. She did not know what to expect.

The principal painted a fantastic and inaccurate picture of how the charter school was a new and upcoming initiative. She told Meg that the school had a brand new building, and that it was going to be an amazing arrangement. Excited about being in a “brand new building” and blending in with “a staff who did not know each other,” she

had no concerns about “cliques.” Meg thought, “How cool is that?” She also expected a good selection of students. To say she was disappointed was an understatement.

*What did I get myself into?* When Meg arrived at the school with her parents, she found out the school was actually a repurposed office building. She sat in the room that would become her classroom feeling disappointed and discouraged. “I balled my eyes out, because it ended up being four offices pushed into one room, and as my first real teaching experience, I was really let down and even more nervous.” She wondered how she would do her job in this type of setting. Her fears began to subside as she met the staff and “of course Pastor Johnston.” Meg stated, “Every time I had interactions with her, I loved her, and I knew that first school’s vision was right for me. It was just a matter of getting over the road blocks.” Meg immediately “clicked” with some people, but later found out that six of them were from the same school. However, the established cliques had not really played into her relationship-building process.

Meg and her mentor got along really well. They started planning and setting up her classroom. As she settled into her surroundings, she became more excited, and the nervousness began to fade. Then school got pushed back a day at a time, until a week had passed. She began to ask herself, “What did I get myself into? And is this really happening, or did I just move to this state for no reason?”

Eventually, the children finally showed up. Meg expected twenty students, but only had 11 or 12. Her nervousness returned, but then all of the sudden, school started. She was teaching and “doing [her] thing.” She recalled, “I was having a good time planning. I was of course living at school. School was my life.” Her brother was the

only person she knew in the area, other than her new co-workers. So, she spent her life at school and at home working on school responsibilities.

The Doral School District's annual reallocation of staff triggered the rumor that the district was going to transfer people to other schools. Sapien did not have enough students to maintain the staff they started with and that, "scared the living day lights" out of Meg. She was finally settled, had students, and felt like she was getting "in the groove" of what she was doing. The risk of being sent somewhere else made Meg uncomfortable. With each passing day, Meg grew increasingly nervous, and eventually the district released the names of the people they were moving to another school. Luckily, Meg found out that she was not being relocated. As it would happen, "I got my paperwork in like an hour before the person before me. So I was like real close but I ended up staying." Meg got some students from a class group that the principal had dissolved because of the reallocations. While the threat had subsided, the rest of the school year was "definitely a bumpy ride, having no specials, dealing with no recess" unless she did recess with the children. Add to this complicated formula having no real recess equipment and you get "a really big learning experience."

Meg began to elaborate on the many challenges and rewards she encountered at SCPCS. She did not get very many supplies from the school, and often spent her own money. She occasionally relied on parents to make sure she had what she needed for her classroom. Her appreciation for the experience of lean times came through in her remark, "I feel like that's made me a stronger person, because now I know what I need and how I can go about getting it from the school, as opposed to just wasting my money away."

Just like so many others, Meg told of numerous purchases that were not common in other schools but par for the course at Sapien.

Meg was familiar with charter schools in her home state. She expected her experience at Sapien to be similar. She anticipated a lot freedom to be creative with the curriculum. Meg hoped to “manipulate things to give the students a better education and a more well-rounded education.” She found that Sapien provided the opportunity to add things into the curriculum or take things out, based on the needs and strengths of the students. She talked about the reward of teaching at a chartered school:

I would say [it has been] rewarding because I've seen some children go through the school where I knew they just needed that extra attention. And being in a charter school, I can manipulate the curriculum, and I can do what I want with it to help my students who were struggling, and that's the biggest reward I could ever have.

Meg commented that the student population was not what she expected. She recalled, “I felt like being in a charter school, we should have families and children who were goal-oriented, who are trying to better their education and want a better education for themselves.” By the end of the second year, however, the school became a place for parents to give their children a fresh start. It was common to get students who were, “running from” their underlying “behavioral and social issues” that had plagued them previously. Meg’s mentor helped her design her classroom management.

***Guided by a mentor.*** Meg’s mentor had the mentality that, “we needed to teach these subjects and these ideas because it's going to be tested and they have to know it.” Meg focused intensely on the State Standardized Assessment. She used her mentor as her reference to the state and district guidelines, instead of using the standards personally.

She relied on her mentor to let her know what was being covered each week. She explained why she did not use them personally:

I was definitely overwhelmed with the idea of having to use the state's standards and manipulate them. I would say the biggest influence [on her teaching focus] was actually my mentor, who guided me the entire way. I would go to her and say, "What standards are we covering?"

While collaboration with her mentor taught her about the district's expectations, it also limited her creativity. Meg admitted, "I was teaching strictly to get these children to understand specific concepts. Her mentor was tied to the same curriculum that was the focus of the new teacher orientation. The new teacher orientation training that Doral County provided covered the regular county curriculum. It focused on how new teachers should use the state curriculum and state standards with district's curriculum books. Meg thought, "As a charter school teacher, I felt like I was walking in knowing I had a different curriculum, thinking that it was wasting my time. They talked about one set of curriculum books that she would not be using. Meg explained the conflicting perceptions:

I expected...well from my school and my colleagues and my principal, I felt like we were going to do everything we could to succeed, especially from the principal...there was a huge hope in her eyes and our founder...However, from the county level, I definitely got a very big sense that we were kind of the black sheep of the family, and that we weren't getting the added help that we needed as a charter school.

For the first couple of years, Meg explained that her goal was, "honestly to just hope see my children improve. Just try to take a child who was struggling and make them feel comfortable in the classroom." She also wanted to help students who were excelling academically to continue to excel.

To accomplish her instructional goals, Meg employed reflection techniques. She stated, “I always sat and thought about what the day's lessons were, and then what I would be doing the next day.” She often went to her mentor to reflect with her. This collaboration proved a beneficial strategy, “It was good for me to see an older colleague showing me how the reflecting process goes.” While Meg was reflecting at least once a week, she felt that she could have done it more often. She frequently tried to figure out, “Okay, did this lesson reach this child and this child. And if it didn't, can I go back and can I teach it again to help these children.”

She was constantly going back to revisit particular lessons, especially for the children who “weren't getting it.” Her desire to meet the needs of her students drove her practice and led her to research new techniques to help facilitate the learning process.

She gave an example:

I remember the second year, I was teaching about Maryland; it was just an impromptu social studies lesson; and I gave them their test, and they failed miserably. So I was like, well what do I do now? So with that, I threw it away. Needless to say, and I went back, and I tried to just teach the basics. [The] majority of my class is second grade; maybe they weren't ready for it yet. So, I kind of went back to the basics and didn't expect to get them to learn that more in-depth information. So, I kind of looked at every situation like that, well if you didn't do good, what can I do? Do I need to dumb it down, for lack of better terms? Or do I need to spruce it up and give them more information. And I was constantly going back and forth, especially that second year having two levels of students.

Reflecting led Meg to notice when some things were too easy or too hard for the students. It helped her to create a balance that helped all of the students understand each lesson. Reflecting guided her in selecting instructional materials and developing strategies to enhance her teaching practice. She started incorporating more hands-on activities; because, she realized, “Some of my students weren't just sit down and listen to

me learners. They had to have those hands on experiences to learn.” Meg talked about an example of how her reflection affected her work with a specific child:

What I ended up doing was, because I reflected and realized that she needed the extra help, I gave her some extra tutoring once or twice a week after school to try to work with her one on one, to give her the attention she needed for that subject.

The first year, Meg taught third grade under the guidance of an experienced teacher. She needed the support of a mentor as she planned and developed her own teaching practice, because in her words, “the training has not been very extensive. My mentor would sit down with me and actually guide me on how to do the shorthand lesson plans... [We] literally went subject, by subject, by subject.” In the first year of Sapien’s operation, her planning process would last about two hours, with a mentoring colleague helping her hammer out the blueprint for the coming week. Meg would then spend a lot more time trying to, “make sure that [she] was staying on target.” Meg estimated her time investment, “[On] my own each week... I would have to say I was there at least two hours every day after school...so, at least 10 extra hours on top of the two hours [with a mentor].” Meg’s mentor retired during Sapien’s second year of operation, and Meg took on the role of mentor. It was just her second year of teaching, and Meg felt like she also needed some support. Meg explained, “I was constantly learning and making myself learn.” She discussed her feelings about the experience:

It did increase my knowledge; but I also feel like, as a first and second year teacher, that I was losing out. I felt like if I have had other stuff...especially the second year, being the mentor teacher...but it was only my second real year in a classroom by myself...I felt like I was missing out, because there were so many other things that colleagues could have given me; not necessarily that I went and found myself. So, I think it helped me and built my knowledge, but I also feel like so much more knowledge could have been created had I had other resources given to me or told to me.

That second year was quite different, because she no longer had a mentor. She explained, “We would also talk about maybe a talkative child that we didn't really know how to handle ... and bounce ideas off of each other.” Meg met and talked with her grade-level colleague about, “scheduling, things that were going on in our days that we needed to maybe iron out, but it wasn't to plan.” She still planned independently and used the books as resources, but she did not plan as extensively as she did in the previous year. She elaborated:

We would also, we wouldn't sit down and formally plan but if a lesson was coming up that one of us needed more information on, we would talk to each other about that and see if anyone had a good idea. And then sometimes it would be to just complain about the working environment.

***Intense planning.*** Meg's second year was an exercise in independent planning. She estimated the time she spent planning, “I was probably planning 10 to 12 hours that week, but it was sporadic and it wasn't all the same.” She developed a new approach to her planning process. She no longer planned everyday for core subjects, but instead took the time to evaluate ways to increase her instructional effectiveness. After she planned for her core subjects, she followed up with, “taking a look at how can I reorganize my room to get more effectiveness out of these children.” This type of preparation dominated her planning time in during the 2007-2008 academic year. Yet, she still time spent “touching base” with colleagues, a necessary practice, even if it was for nothing more than ensuring they were on the same page instructionally and setting monthly and quarterly instructional goals. However, she made it clear, “I do the more in-depth stuff by myself.”

In general, the layout of the first SCPCS building made discussing the environmental conditions with colleagues necessary. She would have to say, "Hey, I'm

going to be louder today. We're doing an activity that's going to be a little more noisy... just to give you a heads up.” The half walls meant that others around the building could hear what happened in individual classrooms throughout the day.

In the second year, the school moved to another building. It was old and needed some care, but it was actually a school building. Meg took time to work with the other teachers on other grade levels. She and the kindergarten teacher partnered for reading. Putting their students together allowed the second and third graders, to provided reading support for the kindergarten “kiddos.” The collaboration also provided opportunities for the little children to show off their blossoming skills. They would visit her room to read a story and do a related activity.

Meg described her planning process as, “intense,” because of the amount of time she invested in planning. She was trying to do everything she could to, “do it the right way.” She said, “Whether there is a right way or not, I felt like there had to be. In my heart, I felt like this has to be done the right way. And there is a right way, and if I don't do it the right way, someone's going to catch me.” Meg would spend hours planning with teacher resource books and a lot of online researching. She was by herself and had no family locally to lean on for support and encouragement. However, that also released her from having to rush home. She continued to explain her process for planning:

So, I would spend hours upon hours at school, and it would be every day. It wouldn't be once a week to plan for the next week...I was sitting down every day reviewing what, what I needed to ... Did I cover what I needed to cover? So, in one word, it would be a very intense session.

To this day, Meg says that if she needs to research a topic, she will go online. During her first two years of teaching, she spent a lot of money buying resource books that were relevant to her grade level and also below and above grade level. She built a

library of resources to help her meet the needs of her students at different levels of ability. She reiterated, “I was trying to cover all of my bases; so I would definitely say I used a lot of resource books, and I used a lot of internet sites.”

Upon realizing that she had students with a wide variety of instructional needs, Meg, “reached out to the founder of our school.” Her second and third graders’ math skills were so different from each other, that she did not feel she would be able to cover all skills for both grades. The founder came and took the six third grade students. Meg continued to work with the second graders. Meg validated her decision to split up the class by stating, “I felt, yes I’m teaching a second-third grade [combination] class, but I should still be able to help all children succeed.”

*Learning the right things.* Professional development did not occur very often the first couple of years. When I asked her about in-service opportunities, she replied, “I felt the Calvert in-services were needed, but I do not feel we were necessarily taught on the right things.” In Meg’s opinion, the administration did not ask teachers what kinds of things they needed from Calvert. While Meg admitted to learning some valuable information in the Calvert in-services, but when discussing other components of the trainings, she commented that she had, “learned that in undergrad.” Meg reflected on the Calvert in-services, “I really remember kind of glazing over and not really paying full attention, because I felt--I’ve learned this already.”

Sapient teachers were not required to attend or conduct in-services on Doral County’s professional development days. Meg recalled, “It wasn’t really a designated time for anything... In the beginning, it was, ‘do whatever you want.’” Meg and her mentor often would use the time to plan. Meg described these planning sessions initiated

by her mentor, “[It] was an opportunity, but I was doing it when I was told to do it.” Meg also expressed her thoughts about not having to attend in-service on the district’s schedule, “I think it’s wonderful, free choice. I feel if the teacher has more to say about what they want to learn and what’s going to benefit them the most; they’re going to get more out of it.”

Learning that flexibility was the most important aspect of working at a school was a lesson that Meg will remember for years to come. She discovered that her best was enough. She clarified, “[It] means no matter how hard I try, how many opportunities and ways I change things...They might just be a C student, and as long as I know that I gave them everything that I could, that’s okay.” Meg’s concern for doing things “the right way” required a hefty time investment. At the time of our interview, Meg had learned “to be more efficient.” Instead of trying to accomplish everything at once, she developed a less time-consuming process. She described her new approach to planning:

Those first couple of years, I definitely was very picky when I was going through it and very specific; and I try to gather every little word and detail...I’ve learned to use my time more wisely...that if I need more description or more information, I can always go back to it ... get the basics and figure out what I’m teaching them, and then go and add on to it.

Meg was very organized and prepared. She analyzed students’ work and re-taught lessons to give students knowledge from which they could grow. Meg’s summarized her motivation for investing her time and money so heavily in those initial years: “I wanted every child to be successful, and I wanted every child to leave my classroom feeling comfortable that they knew what I taught in the classroom. So anything I did was based around trying to give them the fullest learning experience they could get from me.” She defined the school’s shared belief as, “Let’s hope every child

succeeds.” However, she described the district and state’s belief being “very different than the school itself.”

When Meg summarized her experience, she said, “I learned that I can get by, and I can teach these children to learn without much ... I will be the most flexible person because of that first year and having to deal with things that didn’t necessarily go in the correct way.” What an incredible lesson to take from her “first real teaching experience.” She continued, “You have to be flexible. I learned that I can get by, and I can make really great things happen with as little materials as I was given that year.”

***Making an impact.*** As we prepared to conclude our interview session, Meg reflected on a student, whom I will call Daisy. Daisy had a significant impact on Meg’s self-perception as a teacher. Daisy was a brilliant little girl. She stayed at Sapien for about two or three years. Daisy’s mom told one of Meg’s co-workers that her family was planning to move out of the Doral School District, because Daisy’s teachers had to spend too much time focusing on behavior problems. In some cases, her teachers spent the whole day disciplining students. However, after hearing about Sapien’s opening, she registered Daisy and her little brother. Meg’s co-worker later shared that because Meg had been Daisy’s teacher, and shown such dedication to teaching their child, Daisy’s parents decided not move out of the county. Meg glowed as she told me, “That was kind of really cool for me, saying I’m a first year teacher, and I made that big of an impact on this child’s life. She was the first person that made me feel like I was doing my job the right way.”

**Kelly.** Armed with her degree in counseling and a provisional teaching certificate, Kelly came to Sapien because of her interview and interaction with the school's principal. She stated, "When I met with the principal, it just felt like a very welcoming environment. She was a welcoming person, so I decided to go with the school."

Kelly, a second grade teacher, earned her certification through the Resident Teacher Program, met two other Sapien Choice teachers through that program. In the first year of Sapien's operation, the principal had to make significant reductions to the number of original staff after a review of the September enrollments across the district. Kelly mentioned that the school had another first grade teacher before the enrollment changed. As a result, Kelly ended up doing what she called "[a] one-two combo." In her fifth year of teaching at the time of our interview, Kelly openly reflected about her experiences at SCPCS. She had originally planned to work as a school counselor, but decided on a more intimate instructional arrangement. Kelly was excited about the opportunity to teach and was a little unprepared for the challenges she faced while working at a charter school that was still in the early stages of development and operation.

*So many challenges.* Sapien Choice Public Charter School did not provide many of the necessary teaching supplies and the space itself presented many challenges. One of the first things Kelly mentioned was the cubicles, "We had cubicles, so that made it difficult." She continued to list the challenges of that first year:

I don't recall much professional development. Supplies, I remember just spending a lot of money purchasing my own items. Planning, I was lucky to actually have someone that took the time and plan with me. So, planning wasn't

really an issue. We would plan after school, once a week. The only challenge is definitely the supplies and the space.

Kelly clarified that when she took the position, she knew she would experience challenges, “I just didn’t know they were going to be as many. I knew teachers worked hard, but I didn’t realize it was this hard. I’m enjoying teaching because I like being able to interact with the kids daily.”

As I talked with Kelly, she began to elaborate on the numerous challenges. She spoke of the original building not being a school, not having the supplies and having to “spend money that I didn’t have to get the supplies.” She also spoke about behavioral issues among the students. Her training as a counselor enlightened Kelly about the behaviors that can occur in classrooms, but she, “didn’t think there would be so many at once.” The school also offered little instructional support, and as for the insufficient supplies and materials, Kelly found that “asking questions around the district provided little clarification of policy regarding what the charter schools were supposed to do or have.” Kelly saw this as an indication of the public’s perception of charter schools. She explained, “I feel like we didn’t get the support that we should have. At that time, it seemed as though we didn’t have a great reputation and that we were expected to not do well.”

Kelly quickly came to realize that “flying under the radar” and maintaining autonomy was a benefit for the charter school’s teachers, but there were also a few disadvantages. For Kelly, the unique guidelines added to the allure of the charter school arrangement. She made a remark about the pacing, “We could pace a little longer than other schools. Let’s say my students didn’t understand the concept of adding and regrouping. I could spend more time on that, where it seemed like in a regular school we

had to keep going.” In non-charter schools, pacing had interfered with many teachers’ ability to address student’s weak areas. With the more flexible pacing, Kelly had time to re-teach when she found it the students did not grasp the lesson the first time around. She was not particularly families on the school district’s policies, but she had heard a lot about the pacing requirements from other teachers and at the county’s new teacher orientation meeting.

First and second grade students were not tested, but she was concerned about the SSA. It was surprising to see that she was so serious about the test. Clearly, Kelly felt as accountable as those who were preparing their students to take the test. She explained, “You start from an early grade, you know...preparing them.” As a first year teacher, she really did not know what to expect from the students. She did not how her investment would materialize when they finally took the test years later, but Kelly was ready to push up her sleeves and contribute to the long-term test preparation process. Beyond knowing there would be challenges, Kelly said that she had, “No real expectations.” However, Kelly’s preparation in school counseling gave her enough insight to know that classroom management would be essential to her ability to become a successful teacher.

*A team effort.* Initially, during planning, Kelly focused on the curriculum and making sure that her students actually understood the lessons. Kelly admitted to withdrawing from the county’s framework in the second year. She said, “I didn’t always use the framework, and I didn’t use it often.” However, she would collaborate with the first and second grade teachers, her teacher leader. With them, Kelly focused on developing the curriculum and making sure that she included all the appropriate lessons.

She also spent time with her teacher leader discussing areas of weakness and creating strategies and materials for strengthening those weaknesses.

The Resident Teacher Program emphasized the importance of reflection, and it carried over into Kelly's professional practice. The practice of looking back over her week helped her in many ways. She used it to identify what was successful and what was not, and then made adjustments, as needed. The reflection process also helped her to correct some pacing challenges that she initially experienced. Like other novice teachers, she started the year over planning for her lessons, and would have to "cram to and get everything done." Reflecting helped her learn to pace herself better.

Kelly's reflections were also part of her collaborative planning with her team leader. She explained, "I would bring a specific problem to her and get her input, and try something different. She would give me different things that I could try."

*Planning routines.* Planning once a week was a thorough event, as Kelly worked with a teacher leader. The teacher leader guided her through the process of looking at what students needed to do to help her devise appropriate lessons. Kelly told me more about her teacher leader, "I was with a teacher that had been teaching for over 20 years, so her input on teaching phonics stuck with me...The different strategies that she taught me, I use to this day. So I've used it the whole five years."

Kelly's organization and planning processes frequently enabled her to keep students on track and helped them to succeed academically. The process also enabled her to give her students "what they need from what [she] learned" during planning. Before training as a school counselor, Kelly was in the banking industry. Making three career

changes made Kelly feel as if she needed to catch up and prepare herself thoroughly. She explained:

I did a lot of reading and observing, to see what worked and what didn't work. And things that did work, I apply that, and things that didn't, I had to find out why. I'd focus a lot on reading strategies. There is so much to reading, and I would find where I would just focus on the classroom. I would look up things on my own, as well ... I felt like I had to acquire as much knowledge as possible. I felt that things that I did on my own did help me...I would research things on my own; and by doing all that, I felt that you learn more. I learned that you have to plan. You can't just get up in front of the classroom and just go on. Planning is important, organization is extremely important. That's one thing that always stuck with me--you have to be organized.

Kelly extended her planning by independently reviewing books she had from the resident teacher program. In time, she turned to the Internet to find guidance and it served as a valuable resource for collecting ideas to meet students' unique needs. Kelly and her grade-level chairperson would focus on following the curriculum, while focusing on areas in which she felt her students were weak.

I asked Kelly to tell me more about the focus of her planning process and the time it took. Kelly's personal planning sessions often focused on math, reading, and writing. Kelly commented that she does a lot of planning now, but it does not take as long as it did in her years as a novice teacher. I was slightly confused until she explained, "I have a set routine now, where in the beginning, it was all new to me, and time was an issue. I'd spend forever planning, even after sitting with my team leader. Just doing things on my own and organizing. Now, I have paced myself a little better."

Kelly felt that she had "[a] lot less time available during the school day" for planning. This lack of time often resulted in her completing a lot of work outside of the school. In the beginning, SCPCS provided no specials. She stated, "Like, we didn't have physical education or music...during the school day. We have more time now. We

always planned after school, because we had different things that we had to do during the school day in the beginning.”

Kelly measured her effectiveness by her students’ performance. She explained, “That kind of gives me an idea or gauge of how well the students understand the concept... or understand what was taught.” For math and reading, Kelly used the quarterly assessments to divide the children into math groups and reading groups according to their needs.

SCPCS offered three Calvert in-services each year; however, not one seemed pertinent to Kelly. Her response was quite different when I asked her to elaborate on some training from her previous experience. She reflected on her rich background:

I feel with my background in counseling, I kind of utilize that in the classroom. Let’s say, as far as classroom management, if there is a disagreement, just knowing how to approach the situation...children having problems at home, talking with them...I do use my counseling in the classroom...what I learned as a counselor.

**“I’ve grown so much.”** When asked about her limited in-service training, Kelly’s response was simple, as she laughed,

It really doesn’t bother me. I feel like I still have ways of learning how to do things that work. I mean, they’re good to have, but I’m managing somehow without them. It would be great to have it every now and then, but I’m fine.

Having recently graduated with a Master’s degree in counseling, Kelly felt like the new kid on the block. She felt that she did not really know much about teaching, because she had focused on counseling in school. She wanted to experience being a teacher in order to be a good counselor. So, what started as an investment in preparation for counseling children, ended up causing her to “fall in love with teaching.” As a result, Kelly chose not to pursue a career in counseling any further.

Having a genuine motivation for teaching did not remove the anxiety that accompanies starting something new. She stated, “Coming in, I was very nervous.” Her concern was whether she was going to do the right thing, as she wanted to ensure “that my children were going to learn.” However, the budding relationships with her colleagues at Sapien were comforting and supportive.

I was lucky to be put with a great staff, where we’re kind of like a real family. So, it made me feel really comfortable. Overall, I’d say I’m very happy that I ended up here as my first job teaching.

Kelly seemed to have settled into a place that she hoped to enjoy for quite a while. Even though she had not worked at any other schools, Kelly affirmed that she was settled in her practice at Sapien, “I don’t plan on going to any other schools in the near future, because of the relationships I have established with different teachers here and parents.” She commented, “Each year, I just feel that I’ve grown so much, and I look back, and I’m like, ‘Where did those years go?’ And just they are just flying by, and I just feel more accomplished each year.” This statement captures the real source of Kelly’s drive. The more time that passed, the more she became connected and invested in her practice. Kelly eventually completed the resident teacher program, but she had not closed the book on earning her credentials. “Now what I’m doing is pursuing my National Board Certification,” she beamed with pride as she recounted her professional accomplishments:

So, I actually just tested. I did my final test for that two weeks ago, but I have to wait until November to get my results. So, I’m like the type of person where I finish one goal, I’ve accomplished it, I move on to the next thing. But it’s all to become a better teacher.

*“What’s the matter?”* Kelly’s connections with the children reflected her credentials and drive toward professional accomplishment. Kelly shared with me her

experience with little boy, whom I will call Makai. As she began her story, she stared off toward the eastern corner of the room. A smile suddenly appeared on her face as she recounted the tale of experience and connectedness. “I had a child who just would come in everyday, throw his bag down, start crying, and just [be] angry. And I tried to find a way to get through to him.”

Kelly sought help from Makai’s teacher from the previous year, asking her, “Were there any issues with him?” She hoped for clues about how she could get through to him. Kelly learned that the previous year had been tough for him, but the last teacher had nothing to offer her. Makai would not do his work. Even though he was very capable of completing it, he simply chose not to do so.

Kelly made it her mission to find the solution, and decided to talk with his parents. She explained that his parents were very supportive, and together they came up with a reward system for him. However, there were walls that needed to come down before Makai could be successful.

Kelly began to study him, as she tried to understand how she could get through. Kelly explained, “When he came in, well enraged and angry, you couldn’t approach him like, ‘What’s the matter?’ And, you know, screaming.” Employing a little of the proverbial “bedside manner,” Kelly would approach him calmly by gently saying, “Are you okay? How was your day so far? What’s the matter?” At first, Makai would not say a word, but finally he would begin to talk to her. Kelly glowed as she recounted this portion of the story. She continued, “And slowly I started to chip away at that wall that he had built around him. And by the end of the school year, he ended up being one of my

favorite students.” She slowly nodded in affirmation as she finished her story about

Makai:

He was doing his work with no problem. He was volunteering to do things in the classroom. His parents just thanked me for getting through to him and not giving up on him, because I knew he was very capable of being successful academically, you know, as well as socially. And now, still when I see him in the hallway, he just stops. He gives me the biggest hugs all the time.

Makai’s issues were not academic, but emotional. He could cognitively do the work, but had shut down, which kept him from getting started with his assignments.

Kelly’s experience with Makai reflected the utility of her counseling training and demonstrated the need to connect compassion to the academic component of teaching.

**Trina.** When Trina began at Sapient, she was a first-year teacher with a bachelor’s degree in education. She had an out-of-state teaching certificate that was reciprocated when she came to Sapient Choice. With no classroom experience beyond serving as a substitute teacher in her home state, Trina joined the fledgling school. During her interview, Trina learned about the founder's vision for Sapient. She stated, "I like the vision of the school and where it was going, so I decided that this was a good fit for me."

*Left in the dust.* Trina began describing her experience at Sapient. “Well, our building was not...should I say...conducive to learning at that point, but we were lucky because [Kindergarten teachers] were down in the bottom floor.” Not having sufficient supplies and the two or three months delay in receiving the curriculum made it a trying first year of teaching. As she heard the more seasoned staff members complain about the deficiencies, she realized that things should be different. However, she had no personal experience from which to draw a comparison. In response to these challenges, Trina did

“what [she] had to do, and the children ended up still learning and getting...progressing and doing what they needed to do.” She recounted she felt dealing with these challenges during her first year as a teacher:

It was supplies, planning time, and training were all very lacking in our first year, I feel like priorities were put on other things, and, you know, kind of left me in the dust. Luckily, I had a good mentor ... [If] I didn't have her to use at that time, I would've really felt like a fish out of water.

Trina recalled the challenge of needing to buy her own supplies and the lack of training opportunities. “I feel like you're kind of this new child, and [it was] hard for them to figure out, you know, what we should have...what we shouldn't have...through the County or not through the County.” However, she still counted the children as her rewards:

I got to see the children grow, and I guess you can do that at any school, but a lot of the same children I had the first year were still here at my fifth year. So, that's kind of nice to see them growing and changing each year.

Trina lamented, “I started with nothing, so it was expensive for me in the first year, and a little scary.” She expected more of her first year of teaching and thought that because of the school's vision and smaller class sizes, the charter school would offer a more appealing environment. She recalled hearing “horror stories” about the district's curriculum strictly guiding the way teachers taught and was glad for the option to teach a curriculum at her own pace.

Trina elaborated about the district and state curricula, “I didn't feel stifled by it. I knew that it was there, and I knew that I had to follow it, but I didn't feel like it overwhelmed me...I felt that there was a little more freedom.” Trina wanted her students to “have fun” during the learning process, and the freedom to pace her lessons appropriately would make it possible for her to achieve that goal.

At Doral County's training for new teachers, Trina received a big binder of the DCSS's curriculum. The trainers told her that she had to follow it, even though she was at a charter school. She explained thinking, "[This] was kind of scary, because I thought, 'How am I going to work with the students, and follow this? And what if somebody doesn't get it the first day? Why can't I go back?' And they're having me move forward no matter what." However, at Sapien, Trina met other teachers who said, "You don't have to follow this exactly, because we have a little more freedom." That news was a relief for her.

Trina's thoughts about what the expectations for teachers at Sapien changed quickly.

[Initially, I thought, "We should do really-really well." But I came to know that the county was kind of out to get us...I felt like they were out to get us, so at first I felt like we wanted...they wanted us to perform well, but then I felt like they were waiting for us to fail.

Trina started teaching Kindergarten with a few goals on her mind. She wanted her students to enjoy learning, and she wanted them to be able to read by the end of the year. Professionally, she wanted use Calvert strategies, like getting "folder papers" set up. Trina wanted to collect and organize materials that she could use each year. She commented that she liked having a mentor who had taught for 20 years, because she gave Trina many tools that helped her to create a good base.

Trina commented that the planning process was difficult during the first couple of years. She had her mind set to prepare and organize while she planned. She thought this would help her prepare ideas and materials that she could "pull from in the future." She grinned as she stated, "I wanted to have extra things for the kids to do. So I wanted to teach like I had been teaching for 20 years, even though I had taught for one year."

*Doing things the right way.* Trina commented that reflecting did not happen as much as it should have; however, during our discussion, she realized how much reflection was weaved throughout her practice. Sometimes it occurred with a colleague, as she looked back on a lesson plan and saying, “Hey this worked...this didn’t work.” Most specifically, she recalled getting help with the semantics of kindergarten. She learned that she needed to “word things a certain way.” With the kindergarteners, word choice made a big difference. She gave the example, “Instead of saying, ‘Stop running,’ saying, ‘Use your quiet feet’ or ‘your indoor feet’ ... just little things like that. Yeah, definitely, reflecting helped.” She felt like the whole process of teaching involved reflecting and saying, “No, this could go better...This didn’t go as well as I planned.” She also recalled, “If I would do something in the lesson that, I mean, absolutely didn’t work, then I knew when I planned for the next week that I wouldn’t do that again.”

Teachers in the other grades were concerned about preparing students for the test. Trina was concerned about whether her children were “doing the right things” or “doing it right.” She explained,

[Kindergarten class work focused on] the way that they’re doing it or, you know, if they’re completing a certain task, not so much it is done all correctly or, you know...I’m constantly looking for who’s doing the right thing, you know, who’s on task...who’s not on task.

She suddenly realized, “I think we’re doing that (reflecting) all the time – informal observation and formal observation of them.”

Trina had a mentor the first two years. They sat down on Wednesdays to plan for the coming week, and spent about an hour or two weekly preparing their coursework. They went through the Calvert curriculum together. She gave Trina helpful teaching strategies, and they would create different activities. Her mentor also was open to accept

Trina's ideas too. They would choose which ideas to use in their lessons. In the second year, Trina became more independent, and she realized that she "wasn't relying on another teacher to help plan everything. I just had to be more disciplined and prepared."

At first, when she planned alone, she would gather as many materials as she could. She knew she would not use all of it, but "it was kind of raking through what I was going to use and having that base." However, she did not limit herself, "I think the Internet is a great tool, so I would use that to go on and find different activities, or, like I said, different ways of teaching in certain objective...So, definitely that...definitely planning with another colleague is a great way to do that." She also liked planning with a colleague a grade ahead, to learn where the children should be when they leave her at the end of the year. Through this collaboration process, she learned what worked and what did not work. Eventually, she stopped spending extra time looking for things to teach and realized that she finally had that elusive base she was trying to establish.

Trina's collection of resources and ideas was liberating. She said, "When you're teaching, you're constantly learning, and the kids are always different too. So, what works for one child may not work for another child. So, I had to kind of check myself and re-evaluate how I was teaching." She came to realize that she used reflections to recognize differences between her students and to devise instructional treatments for them.

*Everything is prepared.* Trina reflected on the lessons she had learned about planning and preparation:

In the beginning, I feel like I was overly prepared; and then I got a little cocky in the second year, and thought I didn't have to be as prepared, and that's when I learned the lesson that I did have to be "that prepared." I knew how to teach it,

but I still had to have everything prepared and written down and in my head, and knew what I was going to do.

Trina's planning process focused on language arts, math, science and social studies. She taught with mastery in mind as she moved through the curriculum. Trina learned to make things that she still uses to supplement her lessons. She made dolch (sight) word cards with pictures on one card and compound word cars with the parts on the front and rear ends of the car. She used them in her small group lessons, and set them up in centers for the children to enjoy. Trina was unable to decide whether planning time or in-service was more important to her. She appreciated having time for planning when the in-service opportunities were limited. However, she compared her past planning time to her current planning time:

Now, I feel like I have no planning time. I get a half an hour during the day and a half an hour at the end of the day, and it's not enough. However, in the beginning, I would spend hours upon hours at night, working on things for school, and I got burned out, and I realize now that I need to...I try to get as much time as I can here, and then when I leave here, I have to leave what I can here. So, I work at home a lot less than I did in the beginning. I do a lot more during the day now, I try to utilize every free second I have. Not that I didn't before, but every minute I feel like I am looking for the next thing do, even if it's preparing for two weeks from now, because that keeps me ahead of the game and I never feel like I'm floundering.

That first year, Trina went to two DCSS training sessions--the new teacher workshop and a session on evaluating students' school readiness in terms of social and academic preparedness. Both sessions provided her with information that she could "pull from" throughout her teaching experience. Trina also found helpful the Calvert in-service that showed different ways to teach a certain lesson.

Trina's equated not having in-service opportunities more frequently to a coin toss. She told of how much she enjoyed having the time to plan and prepare and how she

longed to learn. She remarked, “Well, to be completely honest, there was two ways I felt about it. The first was “thank God I don’t have to sit through another in-service.” She laughed and continued, “That was one part of me. But the other part of me was hungering for some more knowledge, and learning and extending my practice. So, that part of me was kind of angry that we weren’t getting opportunities for in-services.”

By the time in-service was available, she was working after school a lot of the time. So, when it was time to go to an in-service, she would think, “Oh, not in-service.” She spent the time that she was supposed to be in an in-service planning, instead of paying attention. She gazed off toward the ceiling fan and thought about her lessons, “It gave me time to kind of breathe and you know, plan.” She paused and slowly continued, “-- instead of that.” She was conflicted by her desire to use her time for planning and how she felt when in-service was actually in progress. She “enjoyed [in-service]” and “liked having that extra [planning] time in the beginning.”

Trina recalled, “Initially, [training] was kind of lacking, I think maybe Calvert trainings were once or twice a year. Calvert would send a bigwig or a professional down to basically school us on different ways of teaching with the curriculum...look at the pacing of the curriculum.” Trina thought, “In-services would’ve helped...helped me learn and grow in other ways as a teacher.” However, she worked to supplement her own needs by using the Internet as a research tool, asking colleagues, using purchased resources, going to the library, and reflecting more than she had realized.

Trina “really benefitted” from her student teaching experience. She was quite positive as she described it.

Well, student teaching was huge ... [spending] a lot of time in the classroom ... they would talk about how to deal with the discipline...disciplinary problems. I

didn't really know what they were talking about, but doing it helped. And then when I came here, I kind of was like, uh-oh, you know...I dealt with this already for a year and I...I understand this. I think the key to teaching is classroom management and being prepared. ... If you're not prepared, the children don't know what to expect, and you're left kind of floundering, and as soon as they can sense that weakness, then ... you're done."

Reflecting on her student teaching experience and daily events with the children was part of her mental routine. When a large group of children did not understand something, she had to re-teach the whole lesson again the next day. If she had one child who was struggling, she would work with him individually during quiet time or during playtime.

Trina recalled the influences that affected her teaching practice, "I definitely think that the charter or the vision of the charter, at that time and now, influenced me because it allowed me to be a lot more creativity as a teacher, and I didn't feel so constrained about the policies of the county at that time."

The principal made time for Trina to see her colleagues teach. Even though she had five years under her belt by the time of our interview, she desired to have time for observations now. She realized that there was always more for her to learn, and she wanted to "be fabulous."

Trina shared a few of the lessons she learned the initial year:

I learned that planning and collaborating were very, very important; especially for novice teachers, because you kind of use teachers that have a lot of experience because they know, you know, what to expect...then what not to expect...in the classroom. I learned to (KISS) keep it simple-stupid, because a lot of times, I have these grand plans in my head, and these grand ideas; especially the first year. And when I tried to do them, it was way too much.

I really love teaching in a charter school. I love teaching here. Like I've said before, I agree with the vision that the founder has given us, and I hope to teach at a charter school like this for many more years to come. So, I guess it kind of has jaded me in a way that I don't really want to teach in a public school setting

anymore, because I like teaching here so much. ...It's kind of scared me about teaching somewhere else.

Trina told me a story that exemplified the lessons she will take with her into her future teaching practice. She began by saying, "It's good to be ambitious, but it's also good to sit back and say OK, - simplify a little bit more and [do] not be so hard on yourself."

*Something about a frog.* Having a particularly hard day, Trina went to the copier and it was not working as usual. She needed something for her lesson about frogs. They had spent the whole day on frogs. With every lesson, they were doing frog activities – reading, language arts, math, and science. Well, there was one child, Ahmad. He kept saying, "I'm working on this brog, and I'm working on this brog, and I'm working --." [Trina's laughter interrupted the story] The whole day he was working on his frog. Trina kept listening to him, and it never occurred to her that he was trying to say frog, because she was so wrapped in what she was doing.

He ventured back to her desk later that day, and she asked, "Ahmad, what were you working on today?" And he said, "The brog." She replied, "The brog?" And he repeated, "The brog," and he was pointing at her desk. The light bulb went off. Trina exclaimed, "Oh, the frog!" She then asked him, "Can you say f-rog?" He looked right into her eyes and said, "B-rog." [We both roared with laughter]. At that point, she put her head down on the desk and thought, "Well, that day was totally worth it, because of just that little incident." It made her take a step back and she said, "OK, I need to just laugh at myself every once in a while." All day, she had no idea what he was talking about, and he was talking about the frog (brog) the whole day."

**Tracey.** Tracey gave one reason for leaving her GS-13 federal position, “I always felt like I was supposed to be doing something else.” She joined the Resident Teacher program to become a certified teacher. Tracey’s student teaching in the resident teacher program in the summer of 2006 was her introduction to teaching. The state eventually upgraded her provisional certification when she earned her Master's degree in 2007. Despite having the opportunity to teach at schools that were closer to her home, Tracey decided to join Sapien's staff. When asked what influenced her decision, she referred to her conversation with the principal, "When we spoke on the phone I just felt drawn to come to Sapien, and so that’s what I did."

*A lot to get used to.* Tracey commented, “It was a lot to get used to that first year.” She made several adjustments as a first year teacher. She was transitioning into teaching and had to learn to plan lessons, cope with a vast array of student and parent personalities, and explore the work of being a teacher. “I remember buying a lot of my own supplies.” Tracey recalled that preparing to teach was a financial challenge. Having to purchase items like pencils, pens, paper and markers was expensive. Tracey extended herself further when she bought her own copier to get through the year. She decided to make the investment after spending too much money on copies.

Tracey taught second grade for three months. As a second grade teacher, she planned collaboratively with Mrs. Prelo, a veteran teacher. She fondly remembered Mrs. Prelo, saying, “We worked very well together.” Initially, Sapien had three second grade teachers. The three of them would sit together sharing ideas and lessons.

A few months into the year, Doral County reduced the school’s staff allocation, because student enrollments were too low. Tracey stayed with the school, but shifted to

teach fifth grade. She said that when she was starting to feel like she was “up to speed” with the second grade curriculum, November had come. She then had to become familiar with the fifth grade curriculum. When she moved to fifth grade, she and Janie, the fifth grade chair, would talk about any challenges she encountered. However, they rarely planned together. Tracey taught fifth grade the remainder of that school year.

Tracey was not sure what to expect as a charter schoolteacher. Her mind seemed to register numerous questions. She thought that charter schools would be, “somewhat different” with a “different set of rules” from non-charter schools. She explained, “I figured that I understood that we kind of have our own way of operating that was apart from the regular public schools.” She explained that at the first staff meeting, “I realized that we had this different curriculum. I thought maybe charter just meant we have, I don’t know, different types of classes...but I didn’t know what.” However, she did understand that the words, ‘charter’ in the name meant “that it was more of an independent kind of functioning kind of establishment.” She confessed, “I didn’t know exactly what I was going to be walking into.”

The most significant expectation she had was that it would offer a supportive environment. She described her main focus as the school year began, “I think I just wanted to survive.” She still held on to her impressions from talking to Ms. Madison. She felt like she was joining a school where, “if I had a concern, that I could talk to my administrator and explain to her what was going on, and I’d get support. I expected a supportive environment amongst the teachers.” Yet the stress of being at Sapien was overwhelming. She received a box of Calvert books three days before the students

arrived. Being a first year teacher, Tracey started trying to review the materials and “digested” as much of the information as she could before school began.

Tracey experienced numerous challenges as a new teacher. She learned classroom management strategies while she taught. She quickly learned not to send the children to the office for their behaviors. She struggled to establish her procedure for responding to inappropriate behaviors in the classroom. She recalled, “I was a new teacher and I wasn’t exactly sure how to deal with different behavior things.” She soon came to this realization, “I was on my own to a certain degree.” However, in retrospect, she decided that not getting the support she wanted at the time with student behaviors was not necessarily bad. She explained, “At the time...I saw that I was wanting a little bit more backup. But in retrospect, it was actually a good thing.” Tracey’s experience forced her to expand her capacity as a teacher.

*Planning: The art of teaching.* Even with all of the uncertainty, Tracey was excited about teaching. She integrated her interest in art into all of her lessons. She recalled, “I was a little concerned, because I liked to integrate a lot of arts into my curriculum, and I wasn’t exactly sure how [it would fit in].” She frequently looked at how she could address the skills outlined in the curriculum while integrating art. She was still careful not to let her love of art overpower her focus on teaching the skills in the curriculum. Tracey clarified that she was using the Calvert curriculum to teach and looking at the county curriculum to confirm her pacing.

As a second grade teacher, Tracey did not allow the state curriculum or Doral County guidelines to have much influence on her teaching. She explained her retreat into a Calvert-only approach for her second graders, “[It] all kind of went together. I didn’t

think we were stepping out [of] any kind of box...I don't believe I pulled any aspects of the County [curriculum] in until the second year...2007.”

When she taught fifth grade, she was concerned about how many skills she needed to teach before the school administered the State Standardized Assessment. She explained the importance of fifth grade pacing as she said, “I also wanted to make sure, then, that I was getting in all that I had to get in at the right time, so the kids were ready when the State Standardized Assessment time came.”

Tracey and her co-workers were determined to make sure the school performed well. However, she realized that those she called “outsiders” shared those sentiments.

I mean, as time went on, I heard that outsiders didn't want the charter school to do so well, even maybe board members that weren't behind the idea of charter schools. But I think everybody within Sapient wanted to do well and wanted all of us to do well.

Tracey's instructional goal was to understand the Calvert curriculum well enough to meet her students' needs. She explained, “I aligned myself with what the curriculum said that the students needed to learn...I just kind of took all that, and I taught it to the best of my ability.”

Tracey spent about an hour on collaborative planning each week as a second grade teacher. She and another teacher would “bounce ideas off of each other.” Her more experienced lead teacher would make suggestions as they reviewed the curriculum and occasionally offered materials or lesson insight that Tracey could borrow. They also took time to discuss students who needed a challenge or had begun to struggle with specific skills. Students motivated them to look for ways to modify their instruction so they could provide students with needed challenges or support.

Tracey also planned independently, in preparation for the collaborative session, by looking over the skills specified in the curriculum and drafting some lesson ideas. She also would follow collaboration by “tweaking” the plans from her meetings and integrating art where she could.

Tracey shared that planning became easier in 2007, because the students had music and physical education during Sapien’s second year of operation. During the initial year, she had to plan lessons that took up the extra time that students would have been attending specials. She also had to prepare students to take the SSA, which for Tracey, added the pressure of finishing before time to administer the test.

Tracey established her instructional goals based on, the lessons outlined in the curriculum. She designed instruction that fit her students’ interests and needs. Her planning was necessary to make her goals and instruction useful for her students. Tracey developed lessons that integrated multiple disciplines through art. She had a game that involved students tossing a ball of yarn. Each person who caught it had to say a word from a given category. As the ball was tossed, the yarn created shapes around the children. Tracey led the children in a discussion of the different shapes that resulted from the game. Children became quite excited as they recognized all of the triangles, squares and other shapes they created. Dialogue would expand into a discussion of spider webs as well.

Tracey recognized the benefit of collaboration, because she was not always able to plan with her lead teacher. She commented that she was “at a loss” as she tried to plow through the lessons without a sounding board to share ideas and provide feedback.

Tracey spent a lot of time planning independently, and could only say that she spent, “too much” time planning when she was doing it independently.

*Reflecting, not assuming.* In 2007, Tracey returned to teaching second grade and was able to resume collaborations with her colleagues. During that year, Tracey also started regularly reflecting on her students’ work. She said, “I did not notice the power of reflection probably until later on...not that first year...probably the second year. And yes, it did...It helped to guide what I did.” However, once she appreciated its usefulness, she reflected quite frequently. She clarified, “Yes, probably quite a bit at the end of that first year...going to my second year...It happened all the time.” She explained that with learning the Calvert curriculum, being new to teaching, and figuring out how to manage her students, “there’s so much happening at once, I probably didn’t really get to digest it the way I should have until the end of that first year, going to the second year.”

It was through reflection that Tracey realized how often she made instructional decisions based upon assumptions. She declared, “I made a lot of assumptions instead of actually looking at the individual...the objective...looking at my students. I would say, ‘Okay. Well, I know this student is this or that,’ but not necessarily have any real basis.” However, as time progressed, she discovered “how to actually reflect.”

Reflection was something Tracey discovered in an article she read online. She explained, “I mean, I was learning kind of when I would look at different programs, like on PDFs (portable document files) or something like that, or go online, and when I’m checking for ideas, I would come across different things.” She would use what she read online in her planning and instruction. Tracey elaborated on how her reflections developed, “So, I was also able to reflect that way and see, ‘All right, don’t quite do this,’

or, ‘Need to do this or add more of this.’” She credited her reflection with opening her eyes, saying, “I was more informed, as I started working on my master’s, in how it kind of helped me to reflect more. It taught me how to reflect in a way.” She continued to describe how her master’s program contributed to her growing ability to reflect:

I had to a study of one of my students but they required that we do general reflections, personal reflections. I would say it’s all in how we respond to ours students and why we respond the way we do. A lot of self-analysis had started to happen and I think the idea was for you to uncover any biases that you may have and so I was able to begin to do that. And then as a result, then you had to then look at a student and start making notes about a certain student. It didn’t have to be a student who’s a problem, technically not “a problem student,” but just a student who may have had something interesting for a particular reason...So it was a good process. It was interesting and it also helped me understand that student better after I took objective notes. And it helped me to see that I did make a lot of assumptions.

Once Tracey learned to reflect, she started looking for indications of improvement, noticing students’ interests, and considering the way they interacted with large or small groups. She started to evaluate their reading, analyzing their patterns of errors, and thinking of ways that students might understand things better. Tracey also started using her reflections to guide her instructional activities.

So it kind of helps me to decide, “Okay, maybe I need to do a little bit more of this...have so much of that.” For at least with this one student, I’d try to group the kids when they have similar issues together and work with them like that. It helped me to make changes to my lessons. I adjusted what I needed to adjust in order to meet their needs as I looked at their work, watched them talk and interact, read their papers, listened to them read, did their reading assessments... It drove my lessons...When I would go back with my first grade colleague I would be, “Okay, I’m not quite here yet, but I’ll go and move here, because I noticed this.

*New year, new challenges.* In 2007, Sapien moved to another building, and teachers faced a new challenge--church groups used the building on the weekends. The visitors were not aware or considerate of the investment teachers made in their classrooms. Tracey talked about her first time facing the new challenge. After spending

more than an hour preparing for Monday's lessons, Tracey left for the weekend. Monday morning, she discovered that the objectives and instructions that she had written in the chalkboards had been erased. Many of her materials were used or missing and some of her students' desks had been trashed. She stepped back into the frustration for a moment, "My boards were being written all over on the weekends. So, Monday was always a big F surprise when I came in. I didn't know what to expect, and that could be a bummer sometimes." Sharing a space was a big problem for her classroom, her teaching, and her students. She described what she found on Monday mornings:

... there'd be trash inside of the desks when we come back on Monday, and I have to do a quick, quick clean, look through each of the desks. And sometimes stuff will be so pushed back in the desk, we have gum inside. I think it also maybe made some feel like not such a sense of stability ... the kids feel like it's not their space.

Even though she was unhappy about sharing her space, Tracey began to feel more confident about her teaching. I could see the relief on her face as she continued, "I was getting more of a handle on teaching...on the curriculum, students...just all the many facets of teaching. So it was still rewarding." Her familiarity with her responsibilities and the experience of the first year gave her this sense of confidence. The "supply situation" had not improved much, and she was still spending, "a lot of money to get a lot of things done for [her] students." She wanted to be ready just in case Monday morning came and she found, "no toner or whatever for the copier."

Tracey's reason for spending the time and money on her instruction was simple--she wanted the "best type of environment" for her students. She explained, "I'd tailor things based on what I thought they needed. Also, based on what I knew the curriculum

said they should also have and just try to put it all together.” She wanted her students to learn in a place that was comfortable and safe.

*In pursuit of learning.* Tracey did not remember much training being available during the school’s first two years of operation. She only recalled a few Calvert trainings. She stated, “I do remember the Calvert folks coming over and talking about the curriculum a couple of times in the early part of the school year, and then maybe later after January.” She explained that the Calvert training helped teachers understand the curriculum, and reduced the amount of planning time she needed to use becoming familiar with it.

Even though Tracey had “freedom and flexibility” to plan on the county’s in-service days, she was not satisfied. She stated, “I wish we had more in-services...in-service trainings. I think that would have been helpful...other than the Calvert.” She clarified, “Actually, I would have rather had in-service because we already had our planning time set.”

In lieu of formal in-service opportunities, she attributed her learning to “networking with colleagues,” searching online, and “going back to school” in pursuit of her master’s degree. At the end of the 2007-2008 school year, Tracey started attending training out of state. She attended the Parents, Educators, and Teachers training in Lancaster, Pennsylvania every year around mid-June. Some of the classes offered discussed teaching reading, incorporating arts into the curriculum, and dealing with behavioral issues.

The Resident Teacher Program offered classes through the local university designed to address participants’ needs for completing their teaching certification.

Tracey only needed to take reading and special education courses at a satellite location. The program offered classes during after school hours to make them more convenient for teachers. Learning was something Tracey sought to accomplish for her students and herself. She was constantly looking for new ways of understanding her students and her craft. Her love of art also kept her searching for engaging ways to integrate art into what she taught. ARTSEDGE, through the Kennedy Center, was an online, standards-based resource that she continued to use in her instruction.

*Lessons learned.* Tracey's startup experiences sold her on being prepared. She described how preparation kept her connected to the students and committed to meeting their needs. She elaborated:

I think the more prepared I was, the more I was able to meet the needs of the different [students], because [there were] a lot of them...they're the same in some ways. But a lot of them just respond or [learn] different, in other ways. So I think the more I was prepared for their learning differences, the better it was with them, because they could understand the information.

She declared, "I don't leave things to chance. I think I probably kind of would just...I cover my bases. I make sure that I have something planned all the time."

However, she tried to leave places for improvisation. She explained that when she thought of another way of conveying a lesson or got a suggestion from a peer, she knew how to fit it into the lesson without straying too far from her curriculum.

In the beginning, she felt overwhelmed by the amount of subject matter that she needed to teach, the expense of teaching, and the time she needed to spend preparing. She evolved as a teacher, becoming more focused and purposeful in her teaching. As she

explained, “I’m more deliberate. I take my time more with my students.” She may have appreciated other kinds of support.

Tracey wished for opportunities to observe others teaching. Her experience in the Resident Teacher program provided only a summer school opportunity for observation before she received her first teaching position. Tracey might have found it helpful to observe during the school year and see how someone else implemented lessons and managed their class in the context of a full school day. However, she did not have that opportunity.

When asked to describe some things she learned about herself, Tracey’s smile spread wide as she replied;

I enjoy teaching. I know that. I enjoy life. I’ve learned that... What’s the word? I think eclectic, in way. I like pulling in lots of different modes. I find it easy to adapt or try different things in order to meet the needs of my students. I’m not so great with the paperwork. I know that. I feel like I need a secretary, an assistant, to grade papers.

Tracey enjoyed trying new things and integrating art into her lessons. She described art as being useful for managing students’ behavior. She elaborated on why art was so important to her instruction:

I just find that especially helpful for the younger students ... it seems to help with behavior because it gives them something to kind of focus on and to involve their bodies in. So I have less of that as an issue as a result of arts integration.

***Trial by fire.*** Tracey’s experience at Sapien was challenging and eventful, particularly because she had two students who had serious behavioral issues. She shared some of the experiences she had with a student I refer to as Jon.

Tracy met Jon during her first year of teaching. Jon was a student who had his own internal struggles. She started, “I have heard about kids who had these

issues...behavioral problems, and he was a child who...he didn't have an IEP (Individual Education Plan).” She suspected that Jon suffered from ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder). She and the school’s counselor had discussed his behaviors, which included problems with anger management. She had sent him to the office more times than she could remember. Jon’s school records documented the trail of problems that had followed him from his other schools. No one had been successful in helping him. Tracey would “work with him in the classroom to try to deal with all this energy he had and again, academically he was good.” Jon was an excellent reader. However, she recalled Jon’s violent tendencies:

During that time when he was in my class, he threw a chair and it hit the wall and actually made a hole in the wall. He threw batteries that had fallen out of a pencil sharpener. I think it hit the wall.

Sending him to the office only provided momentary relief for her and the other students. Subsequently, she had to have meetings with Jon’s mother, who disclosed that there were similar issues at home. Jon’s dad was in another state, and was not available to participate in the meetings. However, Jon’s dad did eventually make an appearance before the year ended. Tracey explained what he offered:

He had come in, I guess, to visit the boy, and he was telling me how he had started reading early on...like three or something like that...and they always had books in front of him, and that that's how he calmed down...by reading. So, that helped a bit, but just to know that.

She began to target Jon’s love for reading as a source of inner control and peace. She continued, “That's the only time he was calm was when he was reading chapter books.” While other children were talking and working on other things, he would be reading. She had found a way to reach him. She explained:

Even though he had [been suspected of having] ADHD, if I put in front of him, a chapter book, he would actually sit down and read it. If he didn't have a book in front of him, and we were doing math or something else, he would...that's when he would act out.

Tracey had to find ways to integrate reading into all of her lessons to manage his behavior. She elaborated on how her newness to teaching made understanding how to manage undesirable behaviors difficult:

So, I had challenges. I didn't know quite how to handle that. I said, okay, this is great. He's reading. He was like the best reader in that class, above level, but we had to open a science book sometimes. We had to open a math book sometimes, and the least little things seem to set him off and--so, it was challenging. Like I said, I did not have a frame of reference... I would talk to the principal ... she would give some ideas, but she just basically told me to try to work with him the best I could and integrate other things to the curriculum to kind of keep [him] from getting to the point where he would lose control.

Tracey struggled to fit Jon's love of "chapter books" into her math and science lessons. She thought about it and said, "I can't think of anything special I developed just for him. It was day by day just trying to get through, hoping that it wouldn't be...that he would just...oftentimes, I would use the chapters of the book he was reading as an incentive." She would offer Jon opportunities to read after finishing a short assignment. Sometimes she even bribed him with the chance to tell the class about what he had been reading.

Jon would often declare, "I'm mad right now." Tracey gently nudged him along with her reply, "We have to work on this in our science right now. Let's do this. Get through this and then I can give you your chapter book, and you can share with the class. You'll tell us what you read..." Jon was so locked into his own desires that when the lesson included books, he would not be satisfied until he could read the book he had selected. Tracey figured out a way to get him moving in her direction.

If I thought he was behaving properly, then I would maybe let him...after we read it...just go get back to his desk and read one of his chapter books, as long as he had done the lesson that I had had the other kids in the group to do. So, I did provide those incentives like that, but it was just really interesting to me that a student like that was only calm when he was reading his chapter books...like the books that he had from home...and he would bring those books in. It just wasn't the same like reading a regular textbook. It had to be his chapter books.

She sounded relieved when sharing, "He ended up not coming back. Well, actually, he couldn't have come back the next year, because at that time, the school only went up to the fifth grade, so he didn't come back the next year." After being suspended a few times, Jon's school year ended a week or two early.

I thought Tracey had finished sharing her tumultuous story when she said, "I'm also now thinking of another student. I had another student...similar." Tracey began to talk about a child I will call Andrew. "That other student, actually, he had Tourette's syndrome." She explained that Tourette's patients have "involuntary movements and motions." Andrew broke several items in Tracey's classroom. She explained that Andrew "would tap his foot a lot and wiggle back and forth in his chair a lot." His parents had given her some props to help manage his tendencies. They provided "things like squeegee balls for the boy to squeeze on when he would get like that." Andrew had put holes in the wall in her classroom and in hall near the bathroom. She said that his parents paid for the repairs. The holes resulted from Andrew "kicking his foot." Andrew kicked holes in the wall anytime he waited in line with the class. Tracey shared a simple solution, "He kept doing it and doing it, and actually, we had to hold him at that drop off area." The drop off area was a wide space, where Andrew did not have to stand next to a wall.

Tracey commented that she learned a lot in her first two years. She learned “about students, students’ learning, understanding how kids learn differently, [and] the curriculum.” She said, “It kind of felt like trial by fire.” Tracey summarized her first year of teaching:

That was an interesting year; I had two kids, both of them actually with those kinds of severe behavioral issues. And being first year, it was just rather overwhelming with all the other loose ends I had to get accustomed to and adjusted to.

She repeated the challenges of purchasing numerous supplies and switching grades suddenly. “[I] just wasn't confident at all, it seemed because it was just... everybody was so new, so it was good in many ways, though.” Tracey admitted that she started teaching with, “no frame of reference,” but even with all of the challenges, she “never wanted to go back to [her] government analyst job.”

I know, looking back, I was really growing roots back then; but it just felt so difficult and ...well, it takes fertilizer to make things grow. So I just say fertilizer [laughter], and it's because that's what it felt like I was in...amongst a whole lot of fertilizer that first year...even the second year.

--Tracey

Each participant worked through difficult circumstances while maintaining their focus on students and developing their instruction. Having a variety of backgrounds when they came to Sapient Choice Public Charter School, they developed unique perspectives on their shared experiences and opportunities for learning. In chapter 5, I present the participants’ data through a comparative analysis.

## **Chapter 5: Cross-Case Presentation of Portraits**

When Sapient Choice Public Charter School (SCPCS) first opened, the lack of regularly scheduled in-services was not the only obstacle. Nonetheless, teachers found themselves in an opportune position that gave them the leeway to do things that many teachers had long desired to try. Being a teacher at a charter school in Doral County meant having more autonomy than did educators in the non-charter schools. The school's leaders carefully allotted autonomy to teachers with concern for accountability and commitment to students' learning. Sapient's teachers had the independence to make instructional decisions, and they had autonomy in the use of their time. When school leaders elsewhere in the district designated teachers' time for structured in-services; at SCPCS, teachers had the freedom to use their time as they saw fit. Unfortunately, SCPCS did not provide the same types and frequency of professional development as one might expect in this era of professional development research and implementation. This study provided data on the types of activities teachers at SCPCS used to fill their time in the absence of frequent structured in-service training.

### **Demands**

The teachers at SCPCS faced challenges in a number of areas. First, the school operated in an office building, and many teachers had to teach in cubicles with walls that were too short to contain the noise of lessons and active children. Teachers also had to deal with a scarcity of supplies. Sapient had very little to offer its teachers in the way of resources. The school provided no paper for writing or for bulletin boards and had no resources to purchase staplers, staples, or even tape. Many teachers spent their own money on supplies that other schools provided for classroom instruction.

Each teacher enumerated the items that he or she bought. The two veteran teachers used supplies and materials they had saved from past years, but the first year teachers had to make what they could not afford to buy. In comparison, the four novice teachers used sheer ingenuity to manage with the supply shortage. The two participants with more than twenty years of teaching experience spent more money on copies than supplies. Yet they were glad to teach at the charter school.

Sapient's founding board members had chosen the Calvert School curriculum as the primary course of study for the school. In comparison, the Doral County curriculum was rigid and failed to allow for flexible teaching. The participants all expressed the same relief of knowing they could focus more on teaching students instead of keeping pace with Doral County's curriculum framework. All of the teachers mentioned that the Doral County curriculum specified the amount of time to be spent on each aspect of the lesson and identified the specific skills, activities, and stories they were to teach. It held them to a tight schedule with its calendar pages that were embedded within the curriculum framework. Teachers throughout the charter school rejoiced at the autonomy that Sapient afforded them. However, when I examined teachers' responses I found that the teachers with prior experience using the Doral County curriculum framework reported instances of using it despite it not being required. It was the experienced teachers who celebrated their release from the "rigid framework" while directing their first year peers to refer to it regularly.

Despite being able to use the state and county curricula flexibly, teachers in certain grades still had to make sure their students were prepared to take the State Standardized Assessment in the spring. With the state assessment in mind, some of them

started to refer to the voluntary state curriculum or the Doral County curriculum, both of which outlined the tested skills. Janie and Janet, with years of experience using the state curriculum, felt comfortable using their Calvert materials to teach and only checked the Doral curriculum periodically. However, Janie, a newer teacher, would still check the state curriculum frequently to make sure she had not overlooked any skills. Meg took her cues from her mentor, and used the Doral County framework regularly. The other participants reported only referring to it on a quarterly basis. Clearly, their focus was on using their school's curriculum to teach their students. All of the teachers thought the material in the curriculum from the state, Doral County, and Calvert was similar. According to the respondents, the main difference between Calvert and Doral County's framework was the "unreasonable pacing" of Doral County's framework.

External accountability factors were identified as important by participants who described their anxiety over the expectation that they would be using the Doral County framework. Despite this concern, teachers commented on their enjoyment of the flexibility they enjoyed at the charter school. Each of the teachers spoke of what Trina called, "that dreadful framework." During the group interview, Janie and Trina drew solid affirmation from the other participants as they discussed the Doral County framework. Trina stated:

I think it's overwhelming...and especially for when you're an honest teacher... You look at that, and you think, "How am I going to do all this?" There is no way. You know, I think if you just follow the curriculum that you're given, whether it be Calvert or whatever, you hit everything."

Janie interrupted as she referred to an earlier comment from Janet, "Janet says all the same time, 'You hit everything, and you don't need to worry about it.'"

Regardless of their issues with the curriculum, each teacher demonstrated a sense of accountability for ensuring their students would be properly prepared for state assessments and were prepared for the next grade based upon what was in the other curriculum frameworks. Each teacher had her own way of determining when she would use the county's framework or the state curriculum, but they all used one of the local curricula to verify which skills they would teach. Tracey and Janie seemed to have used most often.

With so many references to “the test,” it was tempting to assume that the teachers at Sapien focused on teaching to the test. However, Janie provided this explanation:

The kids need to know how to do [things]. Even if it's not tested, you teach it. And that is one of the things I like about, you know, being at the charter school. I didn't feel locked in. [Not being one who thought], ‘Well, that is not on the test, so I'm not going to bother about that.’ You know, you're talking about skills you know they need to learn, but there definitely is a difference. You just want to give the kids good instruction. I don't want to teach the test, but I want to make sure they've learned the things that are going to be tested. I'm teaching them the necessary skills. I don't like making the test the ‘end all be all;’ but then, you also create the sense that when the test is over, you know, we're going to teach other important skills. So my kids don't think at all just because [SSA] is over now all of a sudden school is done.

According to the participants, their motivation was student-centered and school-centered. Rhina, Tracey, Meg, and Trina reported feeling inspired by the school's vision, “... to provide quality choice in public education without the expense of tuition.” During the group interview, Trina drew agreement from everyone as she commented, “Pastor Johnston's vision has shaped what I... I knew what she envisioned and that kind of...drove me to do what she wanted, and that was what I wanted, too.” Janet and Janie added to the conversation when they said, almost in unison, that they just wanted to make sure their children “would have mastered everything they were supposed to know when

the year was over.” Each of the teachers felt their instruction closely matched the skills that were outlined in the county’s curriculum by the end of the year. They each identified the same defining difference: At Sapien, they had taught based on how their students were learning the information and paced their instruction for mastery instead of exposure.

### **Indicators of Types of Professional Development**

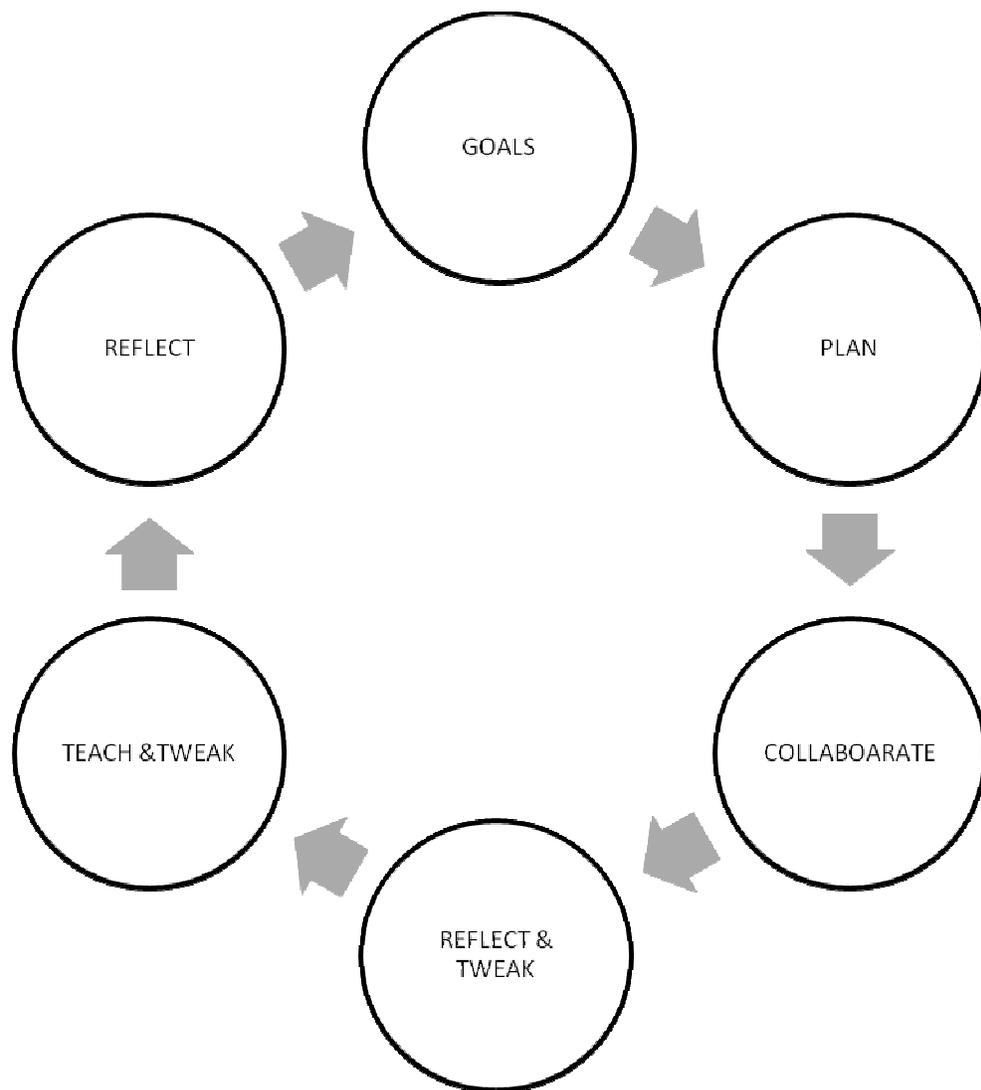
Desimone (2009) used five core features to analyze professional development. According to Desimone, the framework was developed in response to the need to compare and analyze professional development studies that used a variety of data collection methods. As more research begins to attend to the less “discrete activities,” like embedded and active learning, there must be a way to compare them to the traditional forms of professional development (p. 188).

Desimone reviewed the body of professional development research and found that several characteristics of professional development had surfaced in the work of a number of researchers. She highlighted the five features that appeared most consistently and with broad applicability. This study uses those five core features; active learning, coherence, collective participation, content focus, and duration; in the analysis of this data. I explained each of these core features in Chapter 2.

**Active learning.** The teachers at Sapien were engaged in several types of activities that qualified as active learning. One such activity was the planning experience. These teachers worked long hours planning for their students’ lessons. According to the respondents, planning consisted of collecting books and materials, sifting through curriculum guides and searching the Internet for ideas and content. The teachers frequently grouped the planning process into three phases. During the first

phase, many of the teachers prepared for collaborative sessions by reviewing their resources and drafting ideas to share. The second phase of planning involved working collaboratively to write lessons that would be shared with the team members. The third phase was to personalize and extend the community plans so that it would fit their students' needs. However, a fourth phase of planning emerged through the discussions, which caused them to “tweak” the plans. Figure 5.1 displays the cycle of the teachers' planning time.

**Figure 5.1. *The Planning Process***



Each teacher referred to “tweaking,” the practice of making last minute revisions to their plans. Tweaking occurred most often under three conditions: (1) when reflections brought something to their attention, (2) when a change took place in the lesson pacing, or (3) when a new idea seemed to fit better. Respondents reported that planning was an ongoing process that was never truly finished.

Part of the planning process entailed developing materials to aid in the instructional process. Each teacher had lists of things that they created for instruction. These lists included everything from popsicle-sticks and beans used for teaching place value, to kinesthetic games for rehearsing multiplication. Teachers either collected or created math trivia posters, and flashcards, tests and answer keys to enhance the learning experience.

The process of planning, teaching, and in some cases, surviving the school year, taught these teachers a few things about their profession and themselves. Janie and Trina learned that they needed to experiment and get involved in creating their lessons to understand and enjoy it enough to teach the children. Simply reading a set of instructions from a book did not provide the same level of mastery for them or their students. They needed to personalize and take ownership of what they taught. Janie and Meg learned that they had to be flexible, and realized that being a teacher showed them that they were more adaptable than they had realized. A year of obstacles and unexpected events expanded flexibility in many people at Sapient Choice Public Charter School. Kelly and Rhina learned that planning was not optional. They discovered that they had to prepare thoroughly in order to teach effectively. Tracey also discovered many new approaches to

planning and teaching science. Each lesson they learned was evidence of the professional development they created for themselves.

**Coherence.** The process of planning was a multidimensional experience. Planning provided teachers with many opportunities to grow, explore, and learn. It was through the planning process that each teacher discovered the relationship between establishing goals, planning, and instruction. They echoed the same sentiment in each interview. Their goals, planning, and instruction worked in a coherent cycle that began and ended with goals. Rhina said, “It’s all intertwined.” Tracey said, “It’s all tied in together.” Any way they said it, the sentiment was just as consistent as Rhina’s statement, “Your goals drive planning; planning drives instruction; and instruction drives your goals.” Whether they got this concept from each other or learned about coherence through trial and error, these teachers had dynamic sense of coherence as they kept their planning and goals correlated to what they taught. Participants acknowledged the relevance their students’ SSA results would have on their perceived effectiveness. However, they made multiple references to their personal convictions and accountability as they described and reflected upon their motivations. The participants’ motivations are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. Participant Profiles**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Credentials</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Motivation</b>
Janie	DCSS MA, Ed	21+ years	1 <sup>st</sup>	Creativity
Janet	DCSS MA, Ed	21+ years	5 <sup>th</sup>	Students' opportunity
Kelly	BA, Counseling Resident Teacher	First Year	1 <sup>st</sup> - 2 <sup>nd</sup> combo	Social growth
Meg	BA, Ed	1 Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> -3 <sup>rd</sup> combo	Next grade preparedness
Rhina	BS, Biology Resident Teacher	First Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> , 4 <sup>th</sup>	SSA
Tracey	BA, Business, Resident Teacher	First Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> , 5 <sup>th</sup>	Survival
Trina	BA, Ed	First Year, sub experience	K	Phonemic development

Individual motivation was the energy source behind their determination and deliberate effort to ensure that coherence amongst their goals during planning, needs, accountability, and instruction was accomplished and maintained. Motivation was key to the participants' attending to coherence and ultimately drove them to pull the other elements of the Desimone framework into their planning and instructional practice. As such, these data show that motivation is at the heart of all of the other elements of the professional development framework that Desimone provided.

The participants resolved the tension between the external and internal motivators by determining that when they attended to their personal accountability, the external factors were inherently addressed. They commented on being required to attend training that was irrelevant to their needs and experiences. The veteran teachers were motivated to

attend to problems of practice that were focused on individual students' needs. Neophyte teachers were more compelled to attend to the development of pedagogy and strengthening their content knowledge as their problem of practice. One first year participant shared that she wanted to be able to, "teach like Janet," who had more than 20 years of experience, even though she had only been teaching for a year. Members of each group were able to report learning specific things that were related to their personally diagnosed problems of practice. They were motivated to attend to specific concerns until they were satisfied that they understood it.

**Content focus.** Literature presents content focus as relating to specific content areas. However, Desimone also introduced the idea of specific topics as a way to identify the content focus of professional development. While they are often described in literature as one in the same, my analysis revealed that topics of interest and subject matter are two types of content. When I asked the teachers about the focus and goals of their planning, the teachers shared similar responses. Janet, Trina, and Tracey did not have students that would take the SSA. As such, they focused more on their students' levels of mastery. Janet and Trina talked about students becoming independent and mastering instructional objectives. Tracey focused on integrating art as a mechanism to manage behaviors and capture students' attention.

The teachers who taught tested grades also reported skill mastery as their focus, but they also added preparing students for the SSA. They each explained that they did not feel as if they were teaching to the test, but admitted that they were conscious of how it would reflect on the school if the children were not prepared. Even so, they insisted that they taught for mastery as they prepared students for testing. Rhina and Janie

admitted that in year two, they “simply did not get to everything” (in Janie’s words), because they needed to be sure the students had “mastered what was taught before” moving on. Janie and Rhina seemed to be in tune as their separate interviews yielded similar verbiage that identified mastery as most important focus to them.

Each teacher concentrated on the core subjects during planning. Core subjects included math, reading, science, social studies, and for Tracey and Trina, art. However, interdisciplinary approaches to instruction required deliberate effort in planning. Without music and physical education, teachers had an added motivation for frequently integrating fun activities into their daily instruction. As an experienced first grade teacher, Janet had many exciting ways of blending art and music into her lessons. As she worked with Tracey, they shared and combined some of what Tracey had learned from her independently chosen art workshops and the internet with what Janet had tweaked from her years of teaching to create unique and interesting lessons that linked core subject areas with art and music.

Janie struggled to learn ways to meet the needs of her autistic student. Once she discovered the Internet as a resource, she found a wealth of information to assist her with responding to him and guiding him through the classroom experience. She also created lessons that blended new skills with cross-disciplinary reviews of lessons. Each teacher professed a focus on integrating new skills with review lessons. They frequently tried to make their lessons relevant, interdisciplinary, and fun for the students.

Planning specific units required time and focus. She had to plan each detail, from the amount of time spent on the entire unit to the ways she could link the unit to other subjects and the time required for each unit within the school day. Planning was

essential. Janet's ladybug and Rhina's spider units started as science units that were linked with math and reading.

Kelly, Meg, and Tracey extensively researched and planned for managing students' social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Kelly found motivation in her school counseling background, which enabled her to help students resolve their emotional issues. She recognized that some emotional issues interfered with students' classroom experience. As a first year teacher, Meg was determined to ensure that behaviors did not derail her lessons. She focused on teaching her students positive conflict resolution techniques, so they could develop a capacity for responding thoughtfully instead of emotionally.

Tracey's fifth grade year kept her busy, as she struggled to teach a student who suffered from Tourette's syndrome and one who appeared to have Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) with anger issues. Tracey planned for managing behavior and increasing her personal understanding of her students' needs.

Trina developed lessons based on her phonetic focus. Each day was full of activities and lessons that she had crafted to help her kindergarteners gain phonemic and numeric awareness. She wanted them to see the numbers and letters in everything they did.

Each respondent had specific needs that guided the planning and instruction design process. Sometimes their time was devoted to focusing on the curriculum or collaboration. Other times, they independently searched the libraries and Internet for just the right instructional component to make the lesson fit together. Regardless of what activity they used, they recalled reflecting, planning, and preparing in order to deliver the

type and level of instruction their students needed. Purposefully planning was a way to equip their professional toolkits.

**Collective Participation.** The teachers' interactive discourse was a form of collective participation. Many of the teachers reported that they spent most of their planning time collaborating. However, as they revealed the details of their process, it became clear that their independent planning time actually exceeded the time they spent planning cooperatively. Nevertheless, collaboration had set the stage and offered direction for the time they devoted to their independent planning efforts.

All of the new teachers described a planning cycle that resembled a sandwich. They would plan independently before their scheduled collaborative planning and followed their joint sessions with more independent planning. Independent planning enabled them to add their "personal flair" and "iron out the details," to make sure they were prepared for questions the students might ask. Each teacher provided examples of both collaborative planning and other forms of collaboration. Everyone except Janie had weekly collaborative planning sessions, and each teacher admitted to preparing for collaboration by researching and planning independently. They explained that they wanted to make sure they had something to offer in their collaborative meetings. They wanted to exchange ideas instead of merely collecting them.

Collaboration amongst the teachers was frequent and ongoing. Each of the teachers reported collaborating to gain perspective and to collect ideas. Tracey and Janie found collaboration useful for learning and connecting with other staff members; however, when they taught fifth grade together, they admitted to collaborating only sporadically. Janie had long preferred to plan independently, but insisted that she had

“gotten her best ideas from peers.” She identified specific skills that she learned through collaboration, such as using the computer and searching the Internet. Janie said that she learned how useful the computer was as a planning resource. Prior to receiving guidance from her colleague, she considered herself “an old horse” that needed to learn some new tricks. She said that she did not know that “people made all this stuff and put it out there for free,” until someone shared it with her.

Tracey’s planning included collaboration only while she taught first and second grade. When teaching fifth grade, she planned independently and collaborated with people around the school in other ways. She sometimes asked for ideas and listened to the experiences of other teachers. She took their pearls of knowledge and inserted them into her plans when appropriate.

Janet worked with Tracey to create one lesson that would become one of their annual instructional units. Sapient’s location change during the 2007-2008 academic year led to an influx of Latino students from surrounding areas. Janet talked about a lesson that Tracey had suggested for adding a multicultural spin on their teaching. As Hispanic Heritage Month approached, they worked together to refine the details on a lesson that became one of their annual units.

First year teachers Meg, Rhina, Trina, and Tracey referred to collaborating as a type of “safety-net.” Reaching out to other teachers and being able to “learn from others’ experiences” helped them to “develop new perspectives” and better ways of “articulating ideas and skills” for themselves and to the children. It made teaching the same “old things more interesting.” Each of the new teachers remarked that they had a desire to

teach in a manner that denied their novice status. Trina articulated this desire by sharing, “[I wanted to] teach like I’d been teaching for 20 years.”

**Duration.** Doral County’s school system had a busy professional development schedule for its teachers. Each academic year, the district provided what it termed, “professional development days.” On these days, the district closed schools for students to allow teachers time for professional development activities. The county notified teachers in various schools when their attendance was required for training sessions, and expected those who did not receive an invitation to receive in-service at their individual schools.

Making in-service arrangements was the responsibility of the school’s principal; however, the principal of SCPCS arranged for the Calvert School curriculum representatives to provide only three in-services per year. The Calvert sessions focused on elements of their curriculum, the Calvert instruction methods like collecting monthly ‘folder papers,’ which was a portfolio of students’ work samples. The representatives also presented other things that were available for Sapient to purchase during the in-service sessions. Each Calvert training lasted about an hour and the school offered no other training opportunities.

Each month had a new schedule of training sessions. The district scheduled some sessions within school hours and others occurred after school and on professional development days. During the month of August 2006, Doral County’s school system scheduled 25 training sessions. Of those sessions, the district designated 16 for elementary school teachers of Math, Reading, and Science. Teachers at SCPCS attended none of those 16 sessions.

By mid-January, Janie received notification that she should be attending bi-monthly Math training meetings. Her meetings occurred during school hours; however, no other study participant attended county-sponsored trainings in 2006-2007. In the 2007-2008 academic year, Rhina was invited to participate in quarterly Technology workshops, and Janie continued to attend the Math sessions through 2007-2008. Both teachers' training sessions took place during the school day. Nevertheless, no one from Sapien attended training outside of the school building on the designated professional development days. Additionally, teachers' contracts allowed for time at the end or beginning of the day to be reserved twice monthly for in-service or staff meetings. This designated time added to the schedule of training that was occurring elsewhere in the county.

*Sources of time.* Sapien's principal did not provide her staff with school-based training on a schedule that compared with the trainings provided or required elsewhere in Doral County. Teachers did not receive instructions to "do anything specific" on days that had been designated for in-service. The principal did not ask or require them to stay late or arrive early for meetings on a regular basis. Brief staff meetings occurred only sporadically, and training remained isolated to the Calvert curriculum meetings throughout the first two years. However, I considered a variety of instructional elements when examining the way respondents utilized the time allotted for professional development I address each of these elements in the following paragraphs.

Teachers used as much time as possible planning for their lessons, which often entailed staying at school late, taking work home, and, in some cases, going to work early. Each teacher communicated a determination to keep planning until the job was

done. However, I doubt they realized that, based upon their data, the job of planning never ended. These teachers, especially those in the first year, estimated spending seven to fifteen hours planning each week. Their calculations included time spent at home, as well at time that they spent planning after school. Their estimates did not include the five professional development days, when Sapien's principal did not schedule in-service opportunities. Over time, however, most of the teachers reported spending less time planning. They attributed the change to having become familiar with the curriculum and having plans that they could "tweak" instead of having to create everything, as they did in the beginning.

During the 2006-2007 academic year, the teachers' instructional hours were longer than at non-charter schools, because Sapien had no music or physical education teachers (specialists). Having specialists would have provided time within the school day for teachers to plan while their students attended music and physical education classes. In 2007-2008, the principal added music and physical education to the schedule, which created a 30-minute opening in their school day for planning and other school-related activities.

Janie and Janet had previously taught in one of Doral County's non-charter schools. They found that Sapien provided them with more time for planning than their previous teaching experiences. Each of them attributed this increase in time to the decrease in the number of meetings and trainings they had to attend. Janie commented that with the addition of music and physical education, she had even more time for planning.

Both teachers described their reflective practice and evaluation of students' work as part of their planning routines. They explained that they occasionally had to revise lessons while in progress because of nuances in students' needs or strengths that they noticed while they were providing instruction. Each teacher integrated some forms of reflection, assessment, and revision into their planning time. For these seasoned teachers, planning was a process that rarely stopped.

As first year teachers, the other participants could only compare their initial experience at Sapiient to their student teaching. During student teaching, they had larger chunks of time to plan, with the guidance of a certified teacher. Meg estimated that in her student teaching experience, she spent 6 to 7 hours planning within a week. However, when participants were asked whether they had more planning time during their student teaching experiences or their professional teaching practice, Kelly was the only novice who said that she had more time for planning as a professional teacher than as a student. She, like Janie, commented that the additional music and physical education classes created more time for planning during the school day. Each teacher looked beyond the time that the school and district had allocated for professional development to seize opportunities for preparing for and designing their instruction wherever they saw them.

### **Reflection**

When discussing the elements of their planning, the novice teachers described an emergent process guided by collaboration with their more experienced peers. They talked about reviewing the curriculum, collecting materials, grading and creating student assignments, and eventually, reflecting on the day. They did not consider reflecting on

their experiences to be a natural process from the onset. They explained that they learned about reflecting from a peer or from the Resident Teacher Program.

Tracey seemed to struggle with reflecting at first. She explained her initial reluctance by stating, "I did not notice the power of reflection." Eventually, she learned how to use the technique as part of her planning and teaching. Each teacher seemed to use reflection as part of their instructional routines until it became an integral part of their process. Tracy explained,

It drives everything. It drives how you teach, how you assess, what you want to assess, how much more you need to do, what you need to tweak in your lesson, so that the kids are getting what they should be getting.

Analyzing student work, behavior, answers, and questions are things that each participant found useful for understanding their students' needs. Each analytic action they mentioned was part of the participants' process of reflecting. The respondents could have simply concluded that things went well and called it reflecting; however, each participant provided data that specifically identified how each facet of student analysis was relevant to their instruction and planning. It was through analysis that their reflection became relevant. Their evaluation of their personal instruction produced specific knowledge that they used to make instructional decisions while teaching and planning. Each teacher developed a habit of using reflections to guide their practice and did not isolate it to specific learning activities.

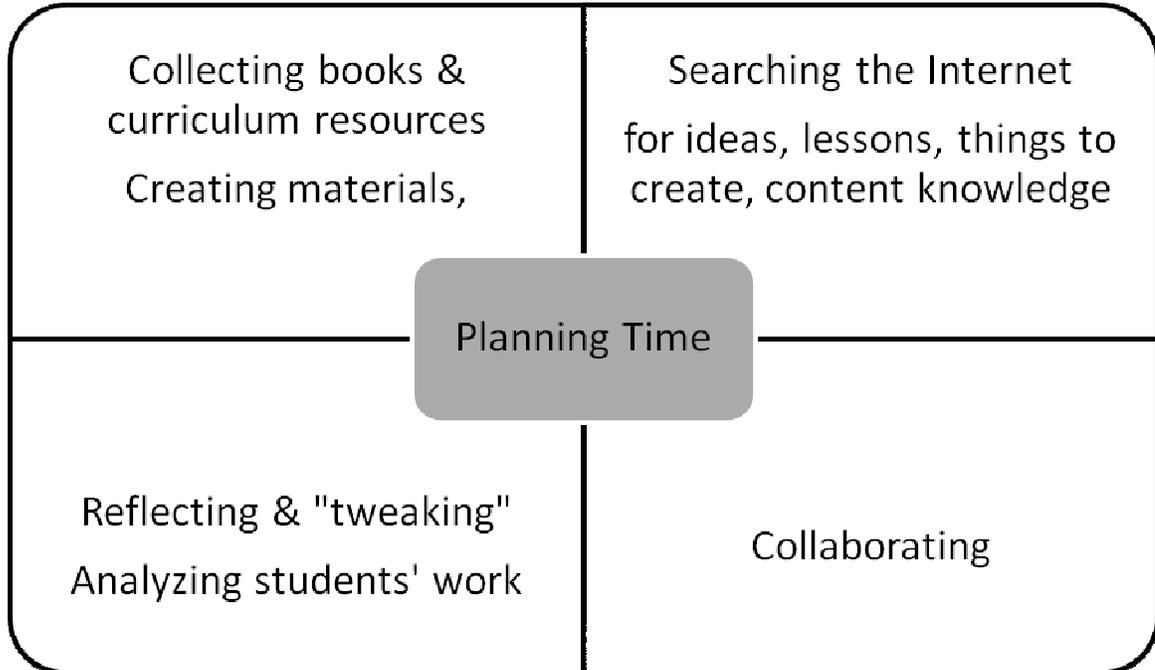
For the respondents, the planning process was a complex component of instruction. Typically, the participants would collect and use their curriculum materials, books, and other resources to plan. They searched the Internet looking for ideas, ways to create cross-disciplinary lessons, and tools they could create to make their lessons more

fun and increase their knowledge about topics they were teaching in the core subject areas.

According to the study participants, the planning process was not complete until they added collaboration, teaching, and reflection to the process. The respondents identified each of these activities as integral parts of their planning routine. The sequencing varied, but the elements remained the same. In the second year of Sapien's operation, teachers began to look at their earlier lessons, "tweaking" them when they could and only creating new lessons based on their students' interests and needs. Critical reflection involved what Janet called, "unpacking your thinking" and experiences. Careful attention to reflecting upon experiences set the stage to being able to question previous assumptions that were behind existing practices and experiences. The result was an understanding that introduced newly constructed perspectives about how teachers learn and led to an "ah-ha moment."

During year two, they also learned how to manage their lessons better. Initially, Tracey, Trina, and Rhina admitted to over-planning. They simply could not grasp how long each element of their lessons should take. As a result, they developed the tendency to plan more than they could accomplish. Figure 5.2 provides a snapshot of the types of activities teachers included in their planning time. Some activities were part of their daily routines, while others happened on an as-needed basis.

**Figure 5.2. Planning Time Activities**



Creating materials seemed to be common at Sapient. Even the more experienced teachers developed their own instructional materials. Janie explained that when she started teaching, all of the other teachers made what they needed. So, she tried to make most of her things, buying only what she could not make. Janet made place-value manipulatives and stations around her room to accompany her social studies and science lessons. Janie created flash cards and math trivia posters to keep her students thinking about the “practical application of math.” Kelly created a variety of math manipulatives. Meg and Rhina created games and centers to engage their students in exploratory and kinesthetic learning. Trina created phonetic manipulatives to encourage her students’ recall and application of sound and letter relationships. Tracey integrated art into as many lessons as she could. Each participant demonstrated a determination to take teaching a step further than what was on the pages of their curriculum. The respondents

credited some ideas to other teachers who had shared ideas that had worked for them in the past. Some developed materials based on a spark of creativity, while others reported searching the web for exciting ideas.

Reviewing students' assignments was common for the participants. Each of them used the process either as a guide toward the next phase of their lesson or as an indication of how effectively they had presented the lesson. Looking at students' errors to understand why a child got the answer wrong gave direction for how to help the student understand the concepts in the future. Evidence that several students demonstrated a pattern of mistakes indicated that re-teaching was in order. Janie, said, "You can't put everything on the students. Everything is not the student's fault." She and the others recognized that they occasionally missed the target and needed to teach differently.

Recognizing which students needed support was helpful to Kelly, Janie, and Rhina, as they prepared for small group instruction. Sapien teachers were not required to teach small groups like teachers in the non-charter schools; however, some of them used the groups as a way to work with specific students who either needed help or a challenge. Each teacher looked at their students' progress to determine how to proceed with their planning and instruction. The teachers repeatedly used reflections to evaluate what had taken place and to determine their next steps for their planning, learning, and teaching.

### **Perceived Learning**

The respondents all reported feeling more accomplished and knowledgeable because of her experiences at Sapien between 2006 and 2008. They felt that they had increased their capacities for flexibility and creativity. Each felt more competent with their pedagogy and time management skills. The novice teachers recalled that in the

beginning, lessons they had intended to last one day often took three days to complete. However, experience helped them learn to plan their lessons to fit their instructional time. Table 2 provides a summary of the sources to which participants attributed their learning. Every participant identified things they learned through reflecting on students’ work comments and progress. They also specifically noted the experience of teaching and the experience of being a “pioneer” at Sapien as a source of learning.

**Table 2. Reported Sources of Teacher Learning**

Teacher	Reading Materials & Curriculum	Internet	Collaboration	Formal Training	Experience
Janie		X	X		X
Janet	X		X		X
Kelly	X	X	X	X	X
Meg	X	X	X		X
Rhina	X	X	X		X
Tracey	X	X	X	X	X
Trina	X	X	X		X
Total	6	6	7		7

Each participant shared that their planning activities during time schedule in-service helped to increase their professional knowledge base. The teachers found information that met their personal needs in curriculum documents, by “searching the web,” and through “collaboration” with peers. They learned what they needed without participating in what Janie and Janet called “a bunch of information that you’ve heard before.” However, not all of the learning that took place happened without training.

### **Formal Professional Development**

In-service was not the only form of structured professional development option available to the teachers at Sapient Choice Public Charter School. Participants had several ways to pursue formal professional development. Table 3 presents a summary of the formal professional development that the participants received. The principal determined who would participate in the Doral County training. The respondents individually sought and selected each of the other professional development options noted in Table 3.

**Table 3. Participation in Formal Professional Development**

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Resident Teacher Program</b>	<b>New Teacher Induction Program</b>	<b>Master’s Degree Program</b>	<b>National Board Certification</b>	<b>Certification Renewal Courses</b>	<b>Optional Workshops</b>
Janie					X(Reading)	X
Janet					X(Reading/Testing)	X
Kelly	X	X		X		
Meg		X				
Rhina	X	X				
Tracey	X	X	X			X
Trina		X				

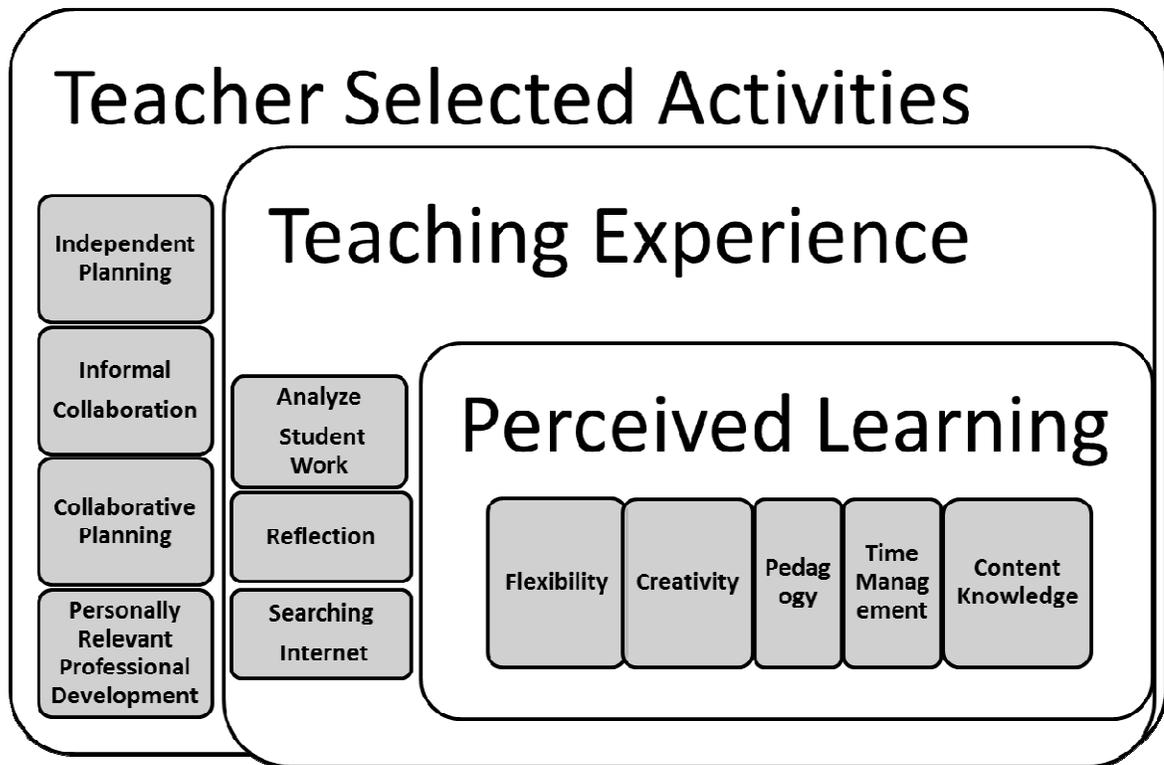
Every new teacher in Doral County had the opportunity to participate in an induction training session before school began. The training for new teachers focused on

reviewing the components of the Doral County curriculum. All of the first-year teachers at Sapien participated in this training. Rhina, Trina, and Tracey also participated in the Resident Teacher Program, which included collectively participating in a cohort and taking college coursework. Tracey and Kelly took additional college courses. Tracey was pursuing her master's degree in teaching, and Kelly started the National Board Certification program immediately after finishing the Resident Teacher program. Janet, Tracey and Janie signed up for optional workshops that they selected for themselves. Janie and Janet also took classes to renew their teaching certificates. Meg's only formal professional development during the focus of the study was her induction training. However, most of the participants neglected to mention the formal trainings they experienced as contributing to their learning when specifically asked.

### **Self-selected Activities**

At Sapien Choice Public Charter School, teachers engaged in a variety of self-selected activities. The data in Figure 5.3 reflects a combination of formal and embedded learning choices. Each teacher rationalized how having a limited number of in-services provided them opportunities to focus on ideas, concepts, and content that was specifically relevant to and the needs of their students.

**Figure 5.3. Summary of Teacher-selected Activities**



Teachers used time typically allotted to in-services to complete activities they determined were necessary for instruction preparation. Teachers used this time for planning, both collaboratively and independently; discussing student issues and, successful lessons; sharing ideas; and reflecting on challenges, sometimes without the express intent of planning. Teachers searched the Internet for relevant formal professional development that would specifically meet one of their instructional or professional needs. They spent time analyzing student work and reflecting on lessons, students' comments, and ideas that colleagues shared. The Internet absorbed a lot of

time, as teachers searched for a variety of resources; including lesson ideas, content knowledge, and other tools. Teachers found many ways to use their time purposefully and productively in the absence of frequent structured in-service. In the Chapter 6, I will discuss the implications for how teachers autonomously used their time in this case.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion of the Portrait**

The study of teachers' use of time in the absence of formal in-service opportunities between 2006 and 2008 resulted in a thick description of a single case bounded by time and the experiences of seven teachers in a newly created charter school. The study revealed complex experiences defined by multiple influences, perceptions, and responses to limited prospects for in-service. The preceding narrative report provided a basis for examining and drawing conclusions about the implications of the contextual decisions the participants made about how to spend the time typically allotted for in-services. Chapter 6 begins the process of answering the research question by identifying the implications in the light of Desimone's (2009) core conceptual framework.

### **Context**

Nationally, the charter initiative is no longer a new phenomenon. In Doral County's school district, however, the charter schools movement had not been active prior to 2006. As a result, charter school leaders were still trying to find their footing as they managed these new entities. These teachers often had as many challenges as the Doral County School System's agents had questions. Often, the school system's gatekeepers of information, materials, and resources had to search to find an appropriately sanctioned treatment for the questions and requests presented to them by charter school representatives and employees.

The initial years of the public charter school initiative in the Doral County school district were anything but a smooth. Limited budgets, for example, required school leaders to parcel out dedicated resources that were barely sufficient to sustain initiatives already in progress. The state's mandates to implement charter schools as a response to

the No Child Left Behind (2001) provision for school choice could not be delayed educational leaders found sufficient funds. As such, the district simply transferred to emerging charter schools the earmarked resources from the state per-pupil allotments for existing schools. These resource distributions only further complicated matters, as the same amount of funding had to support operations at both existing traditional schools and new charter school entities. By adding new charter schools to the school district's expenses without closing any established schools, district leaders served only to stretch thin already limited resources. The result was a shortfall in instructional resources like manipulatives, computers, and computer software.

The charter issued by Doral County to many of these new schools stated that charter school leaders were required to accept fiscal responsibility for a number of expenses; including transportation, building rental, and maintenance costs; all of which districts provided for the (non-charter) public schools. With reduced per-pupil expenditures governing the charter school budget, in conjunction with a phase-based release of money, a number charter school leaders often found themselves with insufficient funds to cover many of the day-to-day operations. As a result, school leaders relegated many key initiatives, like organizing professional development opportunities, to a lower position on their list of priorities.

Sapient Choice Charter School also invested heavily in the implementation of the unfamiliar but highly acclaimed curriculum that was chosen for the school. The Calvert School curriculum was implemented in 2006 and has since 2011, been discontinued at the school. The curriculum purchase included a couple of sessions to familiarize teachers with the elements of the package as some level of in-service. In short, the three annual

in-services provided by the Calvert professionals hardly suffice in this age of professional development. There were no other school-based in-services provided. However, this charter school's students passed SSA both years of the timeframe that correlated to this study. Hence the question: What did the teachers in a newly created charter school do to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional structured in-service training? It stands to reason, in the face of existing research, that in order to cultivate such student success, teachers need to maintain involvement in professional development. Did the teachers' actions sufficiently supplement their professional development needs? While these questions are not essential to this investigation, they do creep into conversations about the events surrounding the school. However, these questions can be researched at a later time along with others that surfaced during the course of data analysis.

The time frame that was selected was a phase of exploration and innovation for the teachers at this school. The teachers at Sapient Choice had a wide range of experience. Some of them had chosen to transfer from traditional public schools with of teaching experience in the school district to a charter school. Others began having only recently graduated from college to begin their teaching experience at the charter school with limited prior exposure to the profession. Whether considered a seasoned professional or a novice, fresh out of college and graduate school; these were neophytes facing the uncharted waters of teaching in one of the first charter schools in this Mid-Atlantic school district.

## **Problem and Question**

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers used time to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional, structured in-service training. The case provided an illustration of the value in teachers' self-directed activities, as well as those embedded in their jobs. Education researchers highly regard Laura Desimone's work in this area. Desimone has conducted multiple studies that have contributed to the argument for recognizing activities embedded in teachers' jobs, as professional development (Birman et al., 2000; Desimone, 2009; Desimone, Smith, & Ueno, 2009; Garet et al., 1999; Garet et al., 2000). However, the relative absence of literature that treats key aspects of teachers' jobs as professional development has contributed to the problem of undervaluing non-formalized learning opportunities for teachers (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko, & Mueller, 2001; Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Remillard, 2005). A review of existing literature also reveals a lack of research that looks specifically at what teachers do with their time to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent structured professional development opportunities. The final element of the problem comes from the general assumption that in-service is the most viable, low-cost method for providing professional development to teachers. I conducted this study in response to the lack of research that investigates what teachers do with their time, in the absence of school-based training, to achieve on-going professional development.

Within the context of this multilayered problem, this study took the participants' complex responses to a shared occurrence and presented it using portraiture. I examined the resulting data through the lens of Desimone's (2009) core conceptual framework. A

compilation of literature on adult learning, types of teacher learning, professional autonomy, characteristics of teacher's practice, time, and core features of professional development contributed to the conceptual basis for the analysis.

The case examined in this study focused on the first two years of Sapien Choice Charter School's operation, which spanned from 2006 to 2008. The participants' narratives, which detailed their experiences at Sapien, combined to provide answers to the primary research question in the study: What did the teachers in a newly created charter school do with their time to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional structured in-service training? Participants' discussions of their planning and preparation processes provided details which contribute to answering the study's research question.

### **Research Context**

The shortage of research investigating how teachers independently create professional development opportunities in the absence of other forms of structured training creates a void in existing literature. Considering the participants' non-formal and embedded activities in terms of the core features of professional development (Desimone, 2009) allows their activities to be recognized as relevant professional development efforts. Emergent research recognizes that teachers' independent investments are valuable to the success of their practice. This study contributes to the emerging research that examines teachers' use of time for independently selected professional development activities often embedded in their daily practice. Constructing this portraiture can help to change perspectives regarding the value of teachers' autonomous learning. This portrait shows what the participants did with the time that was available in the absence of in-

service. Without this data, we would continue to lack much needed information about 1) what teachers do with their time to achieve on-going professional development without the benefit of structured in-services, and 2) what core features of professional development are present in teachers' personal toolkits.

This study examined teachers' autonomous professional pursuits and practices that took place in an environment that had only three school-based in-services. This investigation attends to the structure of teachers' learning as a descriptive feature of their efforts to construct their own professional development. However, it is equally important that we develop an understanding of how the teachers' autonomous activities addressed the five core features of professional development that Desimone (2009) emphasized.

Laura Desimone (2009) has reported the need to accept, recognize, and appropriately investigate a wide spectrum of professional development for teachers. She asserted that the pursuit of her recommendations will result in the collection of valuable information previously ignored in educational research and policy discussions. This study has resulted in data that makes it possible to appreciate a wide spectrum of teachers' learning opportunities, including those opportunities embedded in their daily practice.

**The structure of in-service.** Teachers' in-service programs are used to disseminate a wide variety of information in a short period of time (Sandholtz, 2002). However, research has found that traditional in-service trainings were ineffective in prompting teacher change (Sandholtz, 2002). Traditional in-service implementation has also not been aligned with adult learning research (Sandholtz, 2002). Therefore, it is important to determine whether other forms of professional development, such as the

autonomous and embedded learning opportunities that occur during teachers' daily work, facilitate more success in promoting improvements in instructional practice.

Putnam and Borko (2006) examined the importance of situated learning experiences for practicing teachers and suggested researched-based methods for accomplishing their learning. One suggested method was to ground teachers' learning experiences in their practice by conducting activities at school sites. They also recommended making certain that a large component of the teachers' learning activities occurred in their individual classrooms. They suggested the creation of a study situation that is similar to what occurred at SCPCS, as teachers used their classroom experiences and reflected on student interactions in the construct of their goals, which they attributed to guiding their instructional and planning decisions. These decisions emerged in their portraits as components of their learning activities. Shimahara (1998) described the Japanese perspectives on teacher practice as being based upon a collaborative process with planning treated as a critical collaborative aspect of teaching. Similarly, the participants relied heavily upon their collaborations as a source of knowledge, an opportunity to refine lesson plans and gain clarification.

## **Methodology**

I presented this case study in the qualitative tradition of portraiture. The narratives evolved from a well-defined, complex interpretive perspective. Through the devices of portraiture, participants provided their personal reflections about a two-year period during which they worked as teachers at Sapien Choice Public Charter School. After I collected their narratives, I used my own voice to convey the teachers'

recollections by placing them with the school context. The result was a dynamic description that effectively illustrated the teachers' practical experiences. Thus, using portraiture has led to the creation of an inspiring image that can be examined, discussed, and understood. These portraits reflect the dynamics of teachers' opportunities, choices, and decision making in the absence of structured in-service opportunities.

Data for this study was collected through both individual interviews and focus group interactions. During the focus group, teachers collaboratively reflected upon their experiences. The respondents both corroborated and occasionally refuted their peers' experiences. I explored accounts of their uses of time more thoroughly during individual interviews. Subsequent data analysis helped me to develop a snapshot of the experiences described by the participants. The pairing of interviews with focus groups ensured that each participant was able to present their unique experiences and discuss the comparisons and contrasts of their shared recollections. I presented a more detailed treatment of the methods for data collection and analysis in Chapter 3. My use of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package, helped to facilitate the data analysis process.

Verification of the data included triangulation from multiple sources, corroboration of evidence through documentation of background information, the collection of data through interviews and a focus group, constant comparative analysis, and monitoring for researcher effects through memoing and feedback from participants during and after their interviews. I began collecting background information at the onset of the study. Throughout the study, I conducted contextual confirmation by documenting the claims and situational details that were presented in the data. This confirmation helped to enrich the context and verify the facts within the case.

Although I have taught at SCPCS since its inception in 2006, my portrait is not included. I have been careful to limit my participation in the interview and focus group to the capacity of facilitator. An insider's perception can have a strong impact on data. Therefore, I sought to reduce the effect of my assumptions by asking clarifying questions during the interviews. These measures ensured that I reserved my own interpretations for the data analysis process.

From the onset, I expected each of the participants to share my sentiments about the experience. However, I discovered that the participants held vastly different views of their experiences, and I welcomed the contrast. My recognition of these contrasts confirmed that I had successfully withdrawn myself from the data that I was exploring.

### **Limitations**

This study focused on a single site with eight participants over a finite span of time. Replication and generalization was not possible in this study, as the results are unique to its participants. Uniqueness is based upon participants' perspective, knowledge, and experience. This study also presents limited potential for transferability, based upon the availability of in-service for this bounded case. The study is an illustrative presentation of data that is useful for drawing conclusions and developing inferences about what is possible under very limited circumstances.

This study was a retrospective inquiry, in which the participants' provided data for experiences that occurred almost five years earlier. The study was limited to the recollections of the participants, which I compared and verified through factual records available through school documents, online archives of records, historical and legal documents. The school provided these resources for limited use. The participants'

memories were limited by personal interpretations of thoughts, connotative values, present experience and elapsed time. The human memory is undeniably limited by its sorting of information, selective recall of facts, and general recall error. Limitation also extends to the site and participant sample. I examined only one site, and the participant pool of eleven people was quite small and resulted in only eight voluntary participants.

I selected the conceptual framework for its transferability; however, the limitations of the framework add to the limitation of the study. As a qualitative inquiry, the study is limited by my subjectivity as an insider in the case. My insider status further limits the study due to the potential for personal bias. However, I addressed each of these limitations within the design and conduct of the study.

I did not design this study to evaluate any aspect of its data or measure the degree of success, failure, goodness, or amount of learning. The study followed the non-evaluation analysis suggested by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997). However, conclusions from the collective findings drew upon the study's conceptual framework. As such, the findings provide rich data, which contribute useful insights about teachers' autonomous use of time for professional, formal, informal, and embedded learning pursuits. These findings are illustrations that open the door to further exploration of how teachers use time and construct their own learning.

This study does not examine teacher learning as an isolated focus, but considers that certain teachers' actions can reflect the pursuit of professional growth or learning. Thus, as I move forward, it becomes difficult to discuss what participants' actions in terms that exclude the ideas of learning and growth. Since this study does not measure impact, learning, or growth; the terms learning and growth are merely used as labels in

discussion. As labels, they suggested the participants' intent when they selected the activities discussed in the sections below. These labels do not insinuate measures or impact regarding learning or levels of growth. This narrative report presented unique lived experiences that illustrated what teachers did with their time to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent structured school-based in-service.

### **Contextual Setting**

The Doral County school district issued SCPCS's charter in 2006. Doral County had an aggressive teacher training schedule, and these trainings occurred on designated days throughout the academic school year. The district closed schools on teacher training days so that staff could focus on professional development. The Doral County school district's training on professional development days included departmental meetings, content specific training. Occasionally, the district would provide trainings by invitation only. These trainings focused on content or grade level-specific topics. Training meetings took place at designated locations around the district. SCPCS's teachers rarely received notices of these district meetings.

Principals in Doral County also scheduled regular in-service opportunities specifically for teachers at their school site; however, the principal at SCPCS only scheduled three trainings annually. Representatives from the Calvert School facilitated these in-services on their patented curriculum. As the teachers at SCPCS reflected upon and shared their experiences, they elaborated on events during an era that emphasized professional development.

## **Findings and Conclusions**

This study explored how teachers at a recently opened charter school achieved on-going professional development in the absence of frequent structured in-service opportunities. Findings in Chapter 4 presented individual portraits of participants' experiences. Chapter 5 served to compare the experiences of the individual participants, to illustrate the areas of convergence and divergence in their shared experiences. The portraits were composed of data that, in this chapter, I examine in light of the literature on professional development and learning for teachers and present in terms of the conceptual framework published by Desimone (2009). Using this framework allowed me to sift the data for characteristics of professional development and the multiple forms of teacher learning activities that emerged in the narratives.

**Major findings.** Desimone's (2009) conceptual framework is comprised of five features; content focus, active learning, coherence, duration and collective participation. Each feature correlates to specific characteristics of professional development. This framework is useful for examining data on teacher learning, regardless of the methodology that is used, because it specifically looks for characteristics of professional development without measuring impact or value, and without limiting the type of activity the study explores. These findings have affirmed the core features of professional development that Desimone included in her framework. However, my findings suggest expansions are needed to the Desimone framework in the area of coherence.

**Content focus.** Each participant decided how to use their time and determined what activities were important to them. They had the freedom to focus on subjects and topics that they found relevant as they used their time. Data showed that the content

focus of the participants' learning was variable. One reason for variance was that the context of this study specifically focused on the choices of the participants. The respondents' decisions reflected their knowledge of their individual professional and instructional needs and their perceptions of their students' needs.

Each participant made decisions about how and where to direct their attention during the time that was available. As such, content focus emerged as an independent choice of teachers in the absence of structured in-service. Each participant acknowledged similar foci as they identified student mastery and learning as their primary concerns. Participants concentrated on core subjects during planning. They also discussed topics that would guide or improve their lessons and instructional practice. However, the data showed a focus on specific instructional content based upon the regard they expressed for students' learning and levels of mastery.

Teachers' reports of increased content knowledge likely resulted from their deliberate selection of planning activities for their specific reasons. This statement does not imply that they did not learn, but acknowledges participants' reports that they were satisfied with their efforts to meet specific instructional needs. Participants reported several planning foci that Desimone (2009) suggested would lead to increased knowledge. The data included content foci on core subject areas like social studies, reading, and math. Participants also identified topics like Autism and Tourette's syndrome as their focus during planning and collaboration when unique challenges arose with particular students.

Content focus was not isolated to planning, but also appeared in the activities that teachers performed. Teachers' analysis of student work and reflective practices also

provided room for focusing on specific details, topics, and skills. Data presented many activities with specific foci all autonomously determined by individual teachers. Ball (1996) reported that teachers' autonomy allowed them to shape their own learning. As teachers determined the focus of their planning and instructional activities, they reflected the idea contained in this assertion. Content focus has key strengths that translate into solid preparation.

In this case, the data demonstrates content focus in three areas: subject matter, goals, and active learning. Content focus was present as teachers' specified the subjects they targeted during planning. The subject they identified indicated where their attention lay for that planning session. Focusing on subject matter also provided opportunities for teachers to develop their understanding of subject specific processes and facts.

The data also reflected participants' content focus as they identified their goals during planning. Participants selected certain information and activities to accomplish specific tasks. Sometimes the tasks were measurable and perceivable, and other times they were conceptual. Individual participants identified each goal and determined whether it had been met or was still in progress.

Each of these three forms of content knowledge let the participants work towards improving their awareness of and ability to utilize specific pedagogical and content knowledge. This deliberate intention is a dynamic representation of the literature, which specifically notes that teachers' pedagogical and content knowledge is indicative of their teaching skill (Baniflower, Heck, & Weiss, 2005; Buczynski & Hansen, 2009; Jeanpierre, Oberhauser, & Freeman, 2005; Supovitz & Turner, 2000). I do not suggest that the participants have accomplished their goal of increasing their skill and improving their

pedagogy, as this inquiry has not measured or evaluated the values inherent in the data. This study merely described the features of their practices that existing research appeared to support. The data showed that participants took steps that the literature claimed had the potential to contribute to their development of skill and pedagogy. Content focus also appeared within activities that demonstrated elements of active learning.

*Active learning.* The data indicated that the teachers reflected active learning as they took part in discussions that were meaningful to their planning. Active learning also surfaced as they described their planning routines and planning foci and as they explained the relationships between their goals and their planning, teaching, and instruction outcomes. The respondents also demonstrated active learning in the practices of teaching, reflecting, responding to students, and analyzing students' work, questions, and comments. According to the literature, each manifestation of active learning contributes to teachers' knowledge of academic content and pedagogy (Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; James & McCormick, 2009; Webster-Wright, 2009).

Study participants explained that they chose activities that had the ability to help them meet their students' needs. Teachers also selected those which contributed to their recognition of student needs. Respondents also reported that they chose some of the topics they focused on during Internet searches in order to build their own knowledge.

Participants deliberately designed and selected activities that would perpetuate the vision that each of them perceived as the school's goal. Each of the participants claimed to be committed to the school's goal and vision. They used the school's curriculum and state's standards in efforts to contribute to the fulfillment of their shared goals and vision.

***Coherence.*** In many ways, the data presented an image of teachers who were emulating elements of what research described as a “coherent professional development program” (Borko, Elliott, & Uchiyama, 2001, p. 971). However, the degree of coherence and amount of learning and change has not been the focus of this study. Instead, this study looked at how teachers used their time to achieve on-going professional development and presented the findings in relation to Desimone’s (2009) core features of professional development. As such, I discuss the findings in terms of how the teacher activities were associated with the core features of professional development.

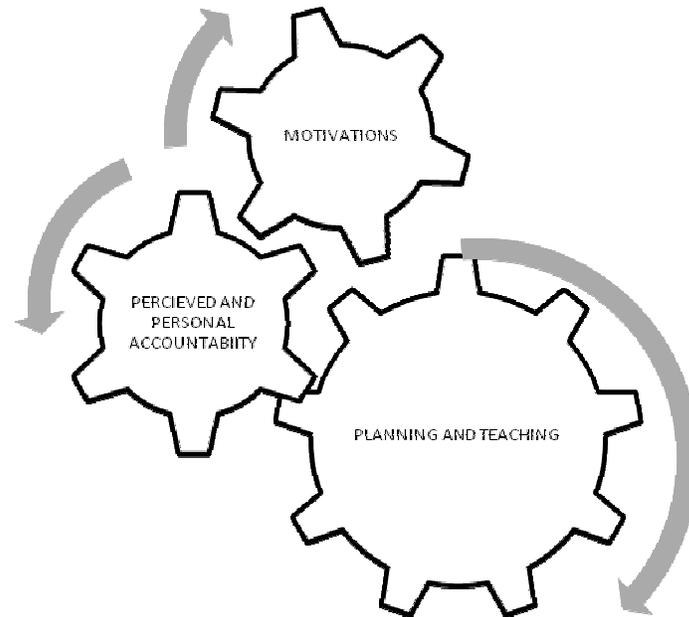
Based upon existing research, coherence manifests as a relationship between goals, needs, and accountability. However, this data reveals layers that emerged when looking at these elements of coherence. The data showed a loose relationship between the participants’ perception of their needs and their students’ needs. Participants used both types of needs to describe the goals they set for their planning and instruction. They used the Doral County curriculum frameworks as reference materials in order to identify skills and standards that they “needed to teach” in order “to make sure the school performed well.”

Teachers commented that their concerns about the test developed from the expectation that the public would measure the school’s effectiveness, and ultimately its success, by their students’ ability to pass the state assessment. The teachers shared their belief that their students’ results on the state assessment would directly influence the county’s perceptions of the school’s effectiveness. However, they reported measuring their own instructional success in terms of their students’ daily performance, skill mastery, and ability to grasp the day’s lesson.

The teachers who actually taught students in grades that would take the State Standardized Assessment (SSA) described their instructional plan as test oriented only until the students had taken the test. Afterwards, they focused on the “other things students’ need to know.” Therefore, the data reflected teachers’ perceptions that their source of accountability was externally directed by how others, including the Doral County officials and the state, would perceive their success in terms of the SSA. However, it also showed that their accountability was primarily intrinsically driven by their personal convictions to make sure “every child [would] be successful,” which was in fact, a personal accountability factor. There is a pairing of both personal accountability and perceived accountability.

Figure 6.1 represents the relationship between the elements of coherence revealed in the data. The data showed a multifaceted relationship between the participants’ motivations, internal, and external accountability, and the planning and teaching experience. The data also showed that participants had some level of awareness that their professional practice should be able to affect their students’ learning. Each participant noted that she deliberately linked planning activities to classroom instruction.

**Figure 6.1: Elements of Coherence**



**Duration.** Duration is the span of time, over which an activity occurs (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Fullan, 1993; Guskey, 1994; Supovitz & Turner, 2000, as cited in Desimone, 2009). This case provided multiple opportunities to examine the concept of duration. This study examined teachers' use of time allotted for in-service over a two-year period. While I do not intend to imply that the participants' engaged in professional development pursuits for this full expanse of time, the absence of frequent, structured in-service presented a long-term event during which teachers exercised autonomy in their efforts to achieve on-going professional development. The teachers' ability to self-determine their use of time created opportunities for selecting activities, focusing on content, and engaging in practices that the respondents considered relevant to their instructional practice.

*Collective participation.* In this case, collective participation is analogous to collaboration, because the participants are from the same school. Collaboration was a dominant theme in the data. Teachers discussed the guidance, ideas, and feedback of their peers as they responded to many of the interview questions about their professional development. At Sapien, collaboration was an important tool in the planning process; and helped the respondents build relationships and perpetuate continuous learning as they shared ideas, experiences, and knowledge.

The context of SCPCS had some variation of the three elements highlighted by Neilson et al.'s (2008) work. The teachers' interviews presented data that indicated they were all more student than curriculum focused. They each demonstrated high levels of collaboration, and autonomy. In the absence of frequent in-service opportunities, the participants came to rely heavily on their collaborations with peers. Respondents developed a system of collective knowledge building as they acquired information, resources, and tools from each other. First-year teachers, like Meg who followed her mentor's instructions carefully as she tried to cover every element of what her students needed, looked for affirmation from their lead teachers and mentors as they planned. The more experienced teachers like Janet who learned to use the Internet with help from a peer, were open to learning about ideas in research, new trends in education, and computer skills that their less experienced peers shared. Both groups provided ongoing support to the instructional team throughout the startup experience.

The data also showed that teachers often collaborated outside of the planning process. These collaborative sessions reflected a purposeful pursuit of information and pedagogy. Participants repeatedly identified skills that they developed in the context of

collaboration. Collaboration, as presented in the data, was a mechanism for absorbing experience and knowledge vicariously.

## **Discussion**

The participants diagnosed their own problems of practice. Their problems of practice were targeted during their planning sessions as they each professed learning and growing professionally because they did “what was needed” to meet identified goals. Pairing intrinsic motivation with specifically targeting their self-diagnosed problems of practice created a window of opportunity where autonomy contributed the outcomes of this experimental context of active learning. Having the opportunity to engage in active learning does not guarantee that it will be engaging or productive. However, when the internal compulsion is met with intrinsic motivation, self-directed teacher learning has an increased capacity to cultivate productive active and embedded learning experiences. Most specifically, they were motivated to attend to targeted and specific problems of practice until their needs were met. Not having frequent structured in-service created an opportunity for teachers to exercise autonomy over their learning activities. There was a consensus that their personal motivations and accountability was more aligned with students’ instructional needs than the external factors. Organic teacher-directed learning was more powerful than imposed formal learning. Like other teachers, (Sandholtz, 2002; Lieberman & Miller, 1990), these participants were not interested in training that was generalized. Instead they were able to minimize training that Janie described as “cover[ing] things she has learned about” and what Meg said, “weren’t necessarily taught on the right things.” The teachers did not completely abandon formal professional development. They instead, were motivated to pursue specific learning opportunities that

fit their issues of practice until their needs were met. Their motivation was fueling their sense of efficacy. As they found themselves satisfied with how they were able to attend to their areas of concern the teachers increased their sense of efficacy. The impact of motivation on the other elements of the Desimone framework can be depicted by adding motivation at the top of the list as in Figure 6.2.

**Figure 6.2 Core Features of Professional Development Driven by Motivation**

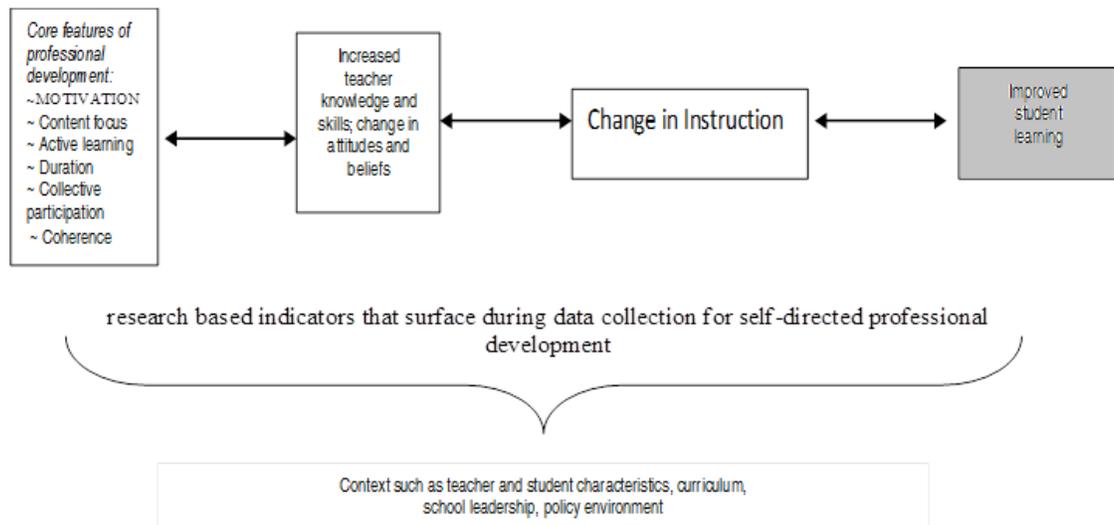


Figure 6.2 shows the area for improved student learning greyed because this study did not address that element of the framework. Motivation is in capital letters to show that it is the element that impacts the others. Motivation is not only an element of coherence, but it is the catalyst that engaged teachers to pursue the other features of professional development within their activities.

The teachers at Sapient had ambitious instructional goals. In the face of many challenges, they maintained a sense of efficacy. They held firmly to their belief that their preparation could make them successful in the accomplishment of their instructional goals. Trina’s statement was similar to those provided by other participants, “I think the key to teaching is classroom management and being prepared.” Planning and preparation

was not a static experience; it was dynamic and ongoing. Janet acknowledged in the group interview, “Well, you never are done.”

The teachers reported learning about their own cognitive process and related their learning to that of their students. The teachers tied metacognition to deliberate choices during planning. They repeatedly noted that planning prepared them to meet students’ needs and improve their teaching “craft.” However, the practice of reflection served as a better indicator of the teachers’ focus on student mastery and achievement. Participants described their reflections as instrumental in the development of new perspectives on how to teach and prepare lessons.

Teachers spent time typically allotted for in-services participating activities directly related to instructional preparation and professional development. These activities frequently were embedded in their daily work. Many participants also shared that they were pursuing formal professional development, even though it was not required. Each of the participants searched the Internet to find training that was relevant to their needs. One participant even reported traveling to another state for training during the summer of 2007. Whether considering the activities that were embedded in their practice or formal forms of professional development, the participants deliberately used their time to achieve on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional structured in-service training.

## **Conclusions**

Teachers at SCPCS never embraced the Calvert School curriculum in its pure form. Rather, the teachers adopted an eclectic approach to implementing the Calvert curriculum. The participants were aware that the district and state’s voluntary curriculum

aligned with the state's standardized assessment. They considered the impact that the SSA would have on their perceived effectiveness and used the various curricula in a unique and blended approach to their instruction. The participants formulated an eclectic use of the state, county, and Calvert curricula that reflected their sense of accountability.

Having the latitude to decide how to use the curriculum and focus on adapting to students' needs was an open door for the respondents to implement, unintentionally, research-based reform approaches in their professional learning regimen. Autonomy allowed the teachers to determine the shape and course of their own professional development. They spent time independently planning; reflecting; and using literature, curricula, and the Internet. Participants also devoted time to collaboration, and sought self-prescribed formal learning opportunities. Each action grew from the teacher's individual professional priorities. Teachers were motivated to use time engaging in communities of practice and actively learning. Active learning allowed teachers to practice specific instructional strategies that they autonomously learned, sought, or developed. Allowing the teachers to have a voice in their professional development experiences empowered them to conduct and guide their own learning in ways that addressed their personal problems of practice.

If properly aligned with research-based implementation, in-service training could have been a viable tool for the first-year teachers who desired more training. However, respondents did not participate in traditional school-based in-service. The data implied that some essential elements of professional development could work without the structure of formal professional development.

## **Further Research**

Continued voids in the literature still speak to a need for research on whether informal application of core elements of professional development provides student learning outcomes that are comparable to those of formal application in professional development. Clearly measuring and determining the value of teachers' actions would require a different type of study. This study only acknowledged indications as supported in existing literature. A study that measures whether participants measurably increase their skill and pedagogy through autonomous, embedded, and classroom-situated learning would provide data that this study did not. Finally, we need to ask, how valuable are teachers' personally constructed learning to their instruction?

## **Closing Remarks**

This data provided a glimpse at the reasoning behind the teachers' use of time for planning and instructional practices. In so doing, this study recognized teachers' capacity for autonomously setting and accomplishing instructional goals and constructing their own on-going professional development in the absence of frequent traditional structured in-service training. In place of frequent in-service, there were teacher-led and personally relevant professional development initiatives. Those initiatives included collaboration, reflection, and activities that were embedded in the work of teaching. Teachers spent their time on efforts they felt added to their content knowledge, as they developed their ability to design instruction and analyze students' learning, and addressed their personal problems of practice. Participants autonomously determined their use of time, the types of activities they used, and the level of collaboration they found valuable. Teachers situated their learning experiences according to and those of their students. The data

presented in this case presents evidence that in the absence of frequent structured in-service opportunities, teachers used time in ways that reflected the core features of professional development, as they worked towards achieving on-going professional development. It also illuminated how personal motivation drives how teachers engage coherence, collective participation, content focus, active learning and extend the duration of their activities.

This data illustrated teachers' autonomous learning that was classroom focused as they worked to address problems of practice. Their personal motivations and autonomy worked in concert to produce an energized exercise of taking ownership of their opportunity in ways that were consistent with teacher learning. Their focused and collective knowledge building allowed them to increase their knowledge and pedagogy only as much as they knew collectively. It was their incorporation of personally relevant formal learning that created opportunities to influence their learning network with new knowledge. Their personally selected formal learning activities helped them to avoid knowledge encapsulation and confronted stagnant practice. Their selected formal learning introduced new knowledge and ideas for problem solving into their collaborative discussions. This study illustrated how teachers learn apart from formal professional development and included how they branched out to pursue personally relevant forms of formal learning even though it was not required. As such, the findings provide implications for how schools structure time and use formal professional development as a means for introducing new ideas for growth, problem solving and instructional development.

The participants in this study were very candid as they described their feelings about the experiences that created this data. They painted portraits that were vulnerable to criticism and championship. The teachers at Sapien Choice Public Charter School offered their stories as a contribution to research at the expense of their privacy and in the face of personal scrutiny and risk. For their commitment to this study and their generous provision of data, I am grateful.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Protocol

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#### I. Introductions

- a. At the time you started working at Sapient Choice, what kind of teaching experience/certifications did you have when you started here?
- b. Did you know any of the staff or board members prior to working here?
- c. How long have you been teaching?
- d. Why did you decide to teach at this school?

#### II. Expectations

- a. Describe your experience in the initial years.
- b. Describe your experience at the charter school. (Supplies, planning, training)
- c. What did you expect being at a charter school to be like?
  - i. How did you expect it to be similar to or
  - ii. Different from other schools?
- d. How do you think external forces (SSA, the school district, or state curriculum) impacted your instructional priorities?
- e. What were your expectations as the year began?
- f. Were there some policies, evaluations of guidelines that shaped some of your expectations? Describe.
- g. Did you feel like you were expected to perform well / fail?
- h. What were your instructional/ professional goals?

#### III. Reflection, Personal Practice

- a. Did reflecting help you identify things to focus on during planning?
- b. Did you take time to reflect on your instructional practice?
- c. Did your reflections help you identify things to focus on during planning?
- d. Describe some things that came to your attention through reflecting.
- e. Describe an instance when you found reflecting useful.
- f. Describe some of times you reflected on the content from previous in-services as you focused on instructional goals?

#### IV. Demands

- a. How was teaching here more challenging or rewarding?
- b. What did a typical planning experience look like?
- c. When considering your knowledge and beliefs about school, the district's or state's policies about what is taught...
  - i. Do you think the existing policies influenced your practice
  - ii. How would you describe your planning and preparation focus?

- V. Learning
- a. Informal Learning Activities
    - i. Describe some of the activities that you integrated in your teaching/planning?
    - ii. Describe some things you did that were focused, integrated, or required work over a sustained period of time.
    - iii. Did you analyze students' work to look for
      1. Indicators of your effectiveness
      2. Evidence of instructional need?
      3. How often?
    - iv. Describe what kinds of things you were checking for as you analyzed students' work.
  - b. Formal Learning Involvement
    - i. What kind of professional development were you involved in?
    - ii. How often did you participate in in-service at this school?
    - iii. Describe the Calvert in-services.
    - iv. Think about the training you received before coming to this school. Was there something specific in that previous training that you found useful to you as you worked here?
  - c. Perceived Change
    - i. How did your analysis of students' work impact your teaching?
    - ii. Why did you do the things you did in preparation for teaching?
    - iii. Do you feel that what you did without in-service helped to increase your knowledge?
    - iv. Was there deliberate learning on your part?
    - v. Please describe some instances.
    - vi. Describe the way you planned and taught before and at the charter school.
    - vii. What did you learn on the during that year –
      1. While planning,
      2. Collaborating, or
    - viii. During any aspect of your activities?
    - ix. How was your knowledge or instructional capacity impacted by your new routine?
    - x. Describe how or whether you view teaching differently after your early charter school experience.
    - xi. How do you think your preparation affected your students?
    - xii. Do see elements of your start-up experiences driving your current time use/management practices?
    - xiii. Compare your practices then to what you do now.
- VI. Time
- a. Did you have time to observe others teach?
  - b. How much time did you have for planning compared to other experiences?
    - i. Schools before this one
    - ii. The time you have available now
  - c. How did you feel about not have regular in-services at that time?

- d. In retrospect, how do you feel about being able to prepare and plan instead of attending regular in-services?
  - e. How did you use your time, during the Calvert Curriculum meetings?
  - f. How did you use your time, when fulfilling your daily instructional responsibilities?
- VII. Desimone's Key Factors
- a. Content focus
    - i. What subjects did your planning focus upon?
    - ii. What goals did your planning focus upon?
  - b. Active Learning
    - i. What kind of things did you do as part of your planning?
    - ii. What kind of resources did you create?
    - iii. What did you learn about yourself? (how you learn)
  - c. Coherence
    - i. Please elaborate on whether there was a relationship between your goals, planning, and instruction from day to day?
    - ii. Did you compare your instruction to the district's guidelines? How?
    - iii. How closely did your instruction line up with the district's instructional goals?
  - d. Duration
    - i. How often did you plan?
    - ii. How much time did you spend planning in a week?
    - iii. Did the amount of time you spent on planning change at any point in the year? If so,
      - 1. How did it change?
      - 2. Why did it change?
  - e. Collective Participation/ Collaboration
    - i. How often did you plan collaboratively?
    - ii. Describe a time that collaboration helped you improve.
    - iii. How much of your planning was done independently, alone?
    - iv. How often did you collaborate with others?
      - 1. Who did you collaborate with?
      - 2. What kinds of information or situations were discussed with other teachers?
    - v. Describe how collaboration influenced your instruction.

Appendix B: Livescribe Field Note Data Collection Sample

Janet 6-2-11  
Sapient 2M19  
Ⓢ

reflective teaching  
purposefully  
reflecting

head shaking 4x  
job done  
is not  
enough → gesture towards desk

C. Coherence  
↳ relationship  
↳ quarterly goals  
(Plan w/ the end in mind)  
instruction

serious expression

left hand in  
come away to  
right - gesture

all of the time

sign of  
relief  
face relax

↳ freedom to teach  
casually

↳ get a focus on  
specific skills

test prep. →

↳ match very closely  
↳ maintain flexibility  
+ autonomy

appear  
head  
nod

0% jump to position 100%

playback speed

volume

58

## Appendix C: Advertisement

Attention All SCPC School Teachers,

Rollia Oliver, a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland, College Park is conducting a study about teachers' use of time in the absence of frequent structured in-service. Participants will be interviewed twice individually and will be observed once in a group meeting with other participants. The total time commitment will not exceed eight hours. Volunteers must be teachers who taught at this charter school during the 2006 to 2008 time periods.

Study Abstract: This study seeks to examine how teachers used time that would have otherwise been spent in frequent structured in-service activities. This study will pay particular attention to teachers' description of the time that was available, the types of activities that were chosen, the motivators that teachers identify, as well as teachers' professional background and knowledge.

Please contact Rollia Oliver to volunteer or to learn more about this study:

Call: (301)-437-4302

E-mail: [MrsROliver@yahoo.com](mailto:MrsROliver@yahoo.com)

**Appendix D: Teacher Consent Form**

Page 1 of 2

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Project Title	Professional Development that Defies the Formal Construct: The Case of a Charter School’s Commencement
Purpose of the Study	<i>This is a research study being conducted by Rollia Oliver, under the guidance of Dr. Hanne Mawhinney, at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you are currently a teacher at a charter school that had limited in-service opportunities when it opened. The purpose of this research study is to examine how teachers describe their experiences and use of time in the absence of school-based in-service. It will to help reveal what types of activities were chosen and the motivators they identified. We hope to better understand the complexities of teachers’ use of time, perceived needs, motivations and strategies for meeting their own needs.</i>
Procedures	<i>The procedures involve participating in not more than two individual interviews for about 60-120 minutes and one group interview observation with other study participants throughout the duration of this study. The study will begin in May 2011 and continue through May 2012. All interviews will be taped unless you request for them not to be taped. All taped conversations will be transcribed. Field notes will be collected for observations.</i>
Potential Risks and Discomforts	<i>There may be some risks from participating in this research study. Educators, Administrators and Board Members work in a high stakes environment. You may face risking your employment based on your possible comments. Safeguards described below will guard against the identification of informants and the release of any personal data.</i>
Potential Benefits	<i>The benefits to you include the opportunity to contribute to research and discuss and share your professional experiences. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of teachers’ use of time, in the absence of school-based in-service. It will to help reveal what types of activities were chosen, the motivators teachers identify, teachers’ perceived needs and strategies for meeting their own needs.</i>
	<i>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by</i>

Confidentiality	<p>keeping all computer files in a password protected computer and a secure digital storage account, field notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s residence. In addition, pseudonyms will be used for all participants, including your school and the school district.</p> <p><i>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p>
Medical Treatment	<p><i>The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.</i></p>
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p> <p><i>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Rollia Oliver or The Principal Investigator, Dr. Hanne Mawhinney at: 2201 Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, College Park, Maryland, 20742 Telephone: 301-405-4546 E-mail: <a href="mailto:hmawhinn@umd.edu">hmawhinn@umd.edu</a></i></p>
Participant Rights	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p>University of Maryland College Park  Institutional Review Board Office  1204 Marie Mount  College Park, Maryland, 20742  E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a>  Telephone: 301-405-0678</p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research</i></p>

	<i>involving human subjects.</i>	
Statement of Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>	
Signature and Date	NAME OF SUBJECT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

## Appendix E: Board Member Consent Form

Page 1 of 3

Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date

Project Title	Professional Development that Defies the Formal Construct: The Case of a Charter School's Commencement
Purpose of the Study	<i>This is a research study being conducted by Rollia Oliver, under the guidance of Dr. Hanne Mawhinney, at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you are currently a board member of a charter school that had limited in-service opportunities when it opened and you were also a member when the school opened in 2006. The purpose of this research study is to examine how teachers describe their experiences and use of time in the absence of school-based in-service. It will to help reveal what types of activities were chosen and the motivators they identified. We hope to better understand the complexities of teachers' use of time, perceived needs, motivations and strategies for meeting their own needs.</i>
Procedures	<i>The procedures involve participating in not more than two individual interviews for about 60-120 minutes throughout the duration of this study. The study will begin in May 2011 and continue through May 2012. All interviews will be taped unless you request for them not to be taped. All taped conversations will be transcribed. Field notes will be collected for observations.</i>
Potential Risks and Discomforts	<i>There may be some risks from participating in this research study. Educators, Administrators and Board Members work in a high stakes environment. You may face risking your employment based on your possible comments. Safeguards described below will guard against the identification of informants and the release of any personal data.</i>
Potential Benefits	<i>The benefits to you include the opportunity to contribute to research and discuss and share your professional experiences. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of teachers' use of time, in the absence of school-based in-service. It will to help reveal what types of activities were chosen, the motivators teachers identify, teachers' perceived needs and strategies for meeting their own needs.</i>

<p>Confidentiality</p>	<p><i>Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by keeping all computer files in a password protected computer and a secure digital storage account, field notes will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher’s residence. In addition, pseudonyms will be used for all participants, including your school and the school district.</i></p> <p><i>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p>
<p>Medical Treatment</p>	<p><i>The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.</i></p>
<p>Right to Withdraw and Questions</p>	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p> <p><i>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Rollia Oliver or The Principal Investigator, Dr. Hanne Mawhinney at: 2201 Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, College Park, Maryland, 20742 Telephone: 301-405-4546 E-mail: <a href="mailto:hmawhinn@umd.edu">hmawhinn@umd.edu</a></i></p>
<p>Participant Rights</p>	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p>University of Maryland College Park          Institutional Review Board Office          1204 Marie Mount          College Park, Maryland, 20742          E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a>          Telephone: 301-405-0678</p>

	<i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i>	
Statement of Consent	<i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i>	
	<i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i>	
Signature and Date	NAME OF SUBJECT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

**Appendix F: Interview questions related to Core Features of Professional Development**

<b>Content focus</b>	<b>Active Learning</b>	<b>Coherence</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Collective Participation</b>
<p>What subjects did your planning focus upon?</p> <p>What goals did your planning focus upon?</p>	<p>What kind of things did you do as part of your planning?</p> <p>What kind of resources did you create?</p> <p>What did you learn about yourself? (how you learn,</p>	<p>Please elaborate on whether there was a relationship between your goals, planning, and instruction from day to day?</p> <p>How closely did your instruction line up with the jurisdictions instructional goals?</p>	<p>How much time did you spend planning in a week?</p> <p>How often did you plan?</p> <p>Did the amount of time you spent on planning change at any point in the year? If so, how did it change and why?</p>	<p>*see collaboration</p>
Changes in teacher knowledge		Changes in instruction		
<p>Do you feel that what you did without in-service helped to increase your knowledge?</p> <p>Was there deliberate learning on your part? Please describe some instances.</p> <p>Describe the way you planned and taught before and at the charter school.</p> <p>What did you learn on the job? How was your knowledge or instructional capacity impacted by your new routine</p>		<p>Describe how you view teaching differently after your early charter school experience.</p> <p>How do you think your preparation affected your students?</p> <p>Do see elements of your start-up experiences driving your current time use/management practices?</p>		

*(Desimone, 2009)*

**Appendix G: Interview questions related to Successful Embedded Professional Development**

<b>Time Management</b>	<b>Teacher selected activities</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>	<b>Implementation</b>
<p>Did you have time to observe others teach?</p> <p>How did you find time for planning?</p> <p>How did you feel about not have regular in-services at that time?</p> <p>In retrospect, how do you feel about being able to prepare and plan instead of attending regular in-services?</p> <p>How did you use your time, during the Calvert Curriculum meetings?</p> <p>How did you use your time, when fulfilling your daily instructional responsibilities?</p>	<p>Did reflecting help you identify things to focus on during planning?</p> <p>How was teaching more challenging or rewarding?</p> <p>What did a typical planning experience look like?</p>	<p>How much of your planning was not collaborative?</p> <p>How often did you plan collaboratively?</p> <p>Describe a time that collaboration helped you improve.</p>	<p>Describe your experience in the initial years.</p> <p>Describe your experience at the charter school. (Supplies, planning, training)</p>
<p>Time</p>	<p>How does the amount of time that was available for planning compare? Please consider when the school first opened (2006 and 2007), previous experience, and what is currently available</p>		

**Appendix H. Interview and focus group questions related to The Theory of Reasoned Action**

<b>Norm-shaping Expectations</b>	<b>Norm forming Perceptions</b>	<b>Reflections</b>	<b>Collaboration</b>
<p>What were your expectations as the year began?</p> <p>Were there some policies, evaluations of guidelines that shaped some of your expectations? Describe.</p> <p>Did you feel like you were expected to perform well / fail?</p> <p>What were your instructional/professional goals?</p>	<p>How do you think external forces (SSA, the school district, or state curriculum) impacted your instructional priorities?</p> <p>When considering your knowledge and beliefs about school, the district's or state's policies about what is taught, how would you describe your planning and preparation focus?</p>	<p>Did you take time to reflect on your instructional practice?</p> <p>Did your reflections help you identify things to focus on during planning?</p> <p>Describe some things that came to your attention through reflecting.</p> <p>Describe an instance when you found reflecting useful.</p> <p>Describe some of times you reflected on the content from previous in-services as you focused on instructional goals?</p>	<p>How often did you collaborate with others?</p> <p>Who did you collaborate with?</p> <p>What kinds of information or situations were discussed with other teachers?</p> <p>Describe how collaboration influenced your instruction.</p>

*(Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980)*

**Appendix I: Focus group questions related to Facets of Teacher Learning**

Formal teacher learning	Embedded teacher learning	Instructional Improvement
<p>Describe the Calvert in-services.</p> <p>What kind of professional development were you involved in?</p> <p>How often did you participate in typical in-service?</p> <p>Think about the training you received before coming to this school. Was there something specific in that previous training that you <u>found useful to you as you worked here?</u></p>	<p>Did you analyze students' work to look for 1) indicators of your effectiveness 2) evidence of instructional need? How often?</p> <p>Describe what kinds of things you were checking for as you analyzed students work?</p> <p>Describe some things you did that were focused, integrated, or required work over a sustained period of time.</p> <p>Describe some of the activities that you integrated in your teaching/planning?</p>	<p>How did your analysis of students' work impact your teaching?</p> <p>Why did you do the things you did in preparation for teaching?</p>

**Appendix J: Interview questions related to participants' background**

At the time you started working at Sapien Choice, what kind of teaching experience did you have?
Why did you decide to teach at this school?
Did you know any of the staff or board members prior to working here?

## Appendix K: Memo format

### **Memorandum**

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT THAT DEFIES THE FORMAL CONSTRUCT:  
THE CASE OF A CHARTER SCHOOL'S COMMENCEMENT

Author: Rollia Oliver

RE: Portraiture: emergent themes (crystallization)

Date: January 2, 2012 Memo #1

Memo entry

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