

Title: Qualitative Focus Group Study of Crystallizing and Flow Experiences in Educators' Professional Development

Author: Jeanne S. Smith

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Mary Renck-Jalongo

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Cathy Kaufman
Dr. Robert E. Millward

The purpose of this study was to explore the personal and professional growth in a small, select group of six educators to uncover the elements that fostered their development and determine how insights gained from “crystallizing” or “flow” experiences were integrated into their classrooms and schools. Participants' perceptions about professional growth, critical incidents that influenced it, individuals who inspired it, and the conditions that nurtured it were explored.

An interpretive research design was used to analyze participants' perceptions and reactions. Themes, processes, conditions, and elements of educator's professional growth were derived from a content analysis of data obtained from four focus group interviews. Interview questions had been developed from practices identified as relevant by the research on adult development, staff development, leadership, change, collaborative processes, reflective practices, and the psychology of “optimal” and “flow” experiences. Interviews were taped and transcribed. Bracketing was used to identify common themes in analyzing focus interview transcripts and participants' vignettes.

The study supports alternatives to current methods of supervision as both more efficient and effective in promoting professional growth. This study found professional accomplishments, stressors or change, educational endeavors, and reflective activities as major sources of professional growth. Effective leadership and meaningful mentoring relationships were also

found to be significant. Mutually rewarding and equally valued collaborative relationships were a common avenue for professional growth in all areas.

Recommendations for future research and practice include: examining the perspectives of staff development coordinators and central office administrator relevant to professional growth; searching for a link between professional growth, professional practice, and/or student achievement; exploring the gender differences in responses related to professional growth and to responses concerning flow theory and critical incidents; and examining relationships between teachers and administrators which create climates conducive to professional growth.