Catholic School Faculty Meetings: A Case Study Linking Catholic Identity, School Improvement, and Teacher Engagement

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While research on faculty meetings is limited, existing literature suggests that meetings could be an arena where schools can address their most pressing challenges (Brandenburg, 2008; Michel, 2011; Riehl, 1998). Building on Macey and Schneider's (2008) Model of Employee Engagement and McGrath's Model of Group Effectiveness (1964), this case study examined the perceptions of teachers in a high-performing Catholic school regarding their own faculty meetings and how those meetings engaged them in the work of promoting Catholic identity and school improvement. Findings revealed signs of Catholic culture were visible within the physical environment of the faculty meeting, which provided opportunities for prayer, catechesis, and strategies for sharing faith with students. Teachers reported the faculty meetings served as a catalyst in developing, discussing, and reviewing school improvement plans, and provided opportunities for professional development. Faculty meetings assisted in creating a participant-centered learning environment and creating a sense of community among the faculty.

Keywords: Faculty Meeting, Catholic Identity, Teacher Engagement

Faculty meetings—for better or worse—are universal features in the professional culture of schools. "In a good school, teachers and administrators learn with and from one another, and faculty meetings are often the best opportunities for this to happen" (Hoerr, 2009, p. 26). Despite their differences from traditional public schools, Catholic schools share common concerns with other P-12 institutions, and faculty meetings are one place where these concerns may be addressed.

While Catholic schools have their own distinct mission setting them apart from public, independent, virtual, and other private, religiously affiliated schools, the faculty members of Catholic schools share many of the same needs. P-12 schools in the United States face dramatic challenges in both what they teach (curriculum) and how they teach (pedagogy). Common Core State Standards, high-stakes assessments, teacher evaluations linked directly

to student performance, fluctuation in enrollments, and implementation of technology are some of the concerns both Catholic and traditional public schools currently face.

Standard 7 of the National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools makes it clear that, with the exception of their commitment to "Gospel values," Catholic schools share common burdens with other P-12 institutions: "An excellent Catholic school has a clearly articulated, rigorous curriculum aligned with relevant standards, 21st century skills, and Gospel values, implemented through effective instruction" (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012, p. 22). Due to their unique mission within the Church, Catholic schools also face the need to maintain a strong Catholic identity. Common Core State Standards in Catholic schools, for example, must be aligned with the "faith, principles, values, and social justice themes inherent in the mission of a Catholic school" (National Catholic Education Association, 2013, p. 1). In 1997, the Congregation for Catholic Education published *The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium*, which summarized, "This unique Catholic identity makes our Catholic elementary and secondary schools 'schools for the human person' and allows them to fill a critical role in the future life of our Church, our country and our world" (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, p. 8).

This qualitative case study explored the role of faculty meetings in one high-performing Catholic elementary school, focusing on how faculty meetings help promote the school's Catholic identity and academic achievement. In this school, faculty meetings functioned as participant-focused learning environment that reinforced both Catholic identity and academic excellence, suggesting specific practices other Catholic schools might consider in their own efforts to improve the quality and relevance of their faculty meetings.

Background

While research on faculty meetings is limited, existing literature suggests that meetings may be an arena where schools can address their most pressing challenges (Brandenburg, 2008; Michel, 2011; Riehl, 1998). For Catholic schools, faculty meetings might serve the dual purpose of effectively preserving and promoting Catholic identity, while simultaneously ensuring high standards of academic success for all students.

Catholic Identity

Research to this point has been silent as to whether faculty meetings can support the promotion and protection of the Catholic identity in schools.

But what is the nature of this identity to begin with? The most recent and comprehensive work on Catholic identity is found in the *National Standards and Benchmarks for Effective Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools* (NS-BECS) (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012), issued by the Center for Catholic School Effectiveness. Included in this document are key characteristics that "define the deep Catholic identity of Catholic schools and serve as the platform on which the standards and benchmarks rest" (p. 1), including the following: Centered in the Person of Jesus Christ; Contributing to the Evangelizing Mission of the Church; Distinguished by Excellence; Committed to Educate the Whole Child; Steeped in a Catholic Worldview; Sustained by Gospel Witness; Shaped by Communion and Community; Accessible to All Students; Established by the Expressed Authority of the Bishop (Ozar & Weitzel-O'Neill & Weitzel-O'Neill, 2012, pp. 2-3).

Convey (2012) suggested an operational model of Catholic identity expressed as both *content* (religious instruction and a curriculum that intentionally reflects an integrated understanding of how the faith is magnified in all subjects) and *culture* (including both service and the ritual and symbolic living out of the faith through liturgy and prayer).

These understandings of Catholic identity emerged from previous decades of official teachings on the role of education in the Catholic Church. The Declaration on Christian Education, *Gravissimum Educationis* (1965) declared that what makes the Catholic school distinctive is its religious dimension [Catholic identity], and that this is to be found in "(a) the educational climate, (b) the personal development of each student, (c) the relationship established between culture and the Gospel, and (d) the illumination of all knowledge with the light of faith" (p. 1).

Thus, Catholic identity is foundational to the mission of Catholic schools — the true and only reason for their existence. Catholic educators should not assume, however, that the faith identity of Catholic schools is universally robust. Topping (2015) argues that Catholic youth in our increasingly secular culture need to be educated in a more intentionally faith-focused environment. Indeed, an entire conference was held in 2011 at the Catholic University of America focused on the topic of Catholic identity in schools (Zimmerman, 2011), and the Catholic Education Foundation has established a Catholic School Identity Assessment to help schools understand and strengthen their faith identity (Hays, 2016). These developments reflect the critical importance of preserving and promoting Catholic identity as a school improvement goal that parallels or supersedes aspirations for high academic achievement.

For purposes of the study described here, we defined Catholic identity as the way a Catholic school's faculty, students, parents, and other stakeholders share and live out core Catholic truths as an essential component of the process of teaching and learning. We explored Catholic identity as it manifests in the faculty meetings of one purposively-chosen school.

Faculty Meetings

A dearth of empirical research exists on the topic of faculty meetings or their utility for addressing large-scale, school-wide challenges. We could locate only three empirical studies over the last 25 years (Brandenburg, 2008; Michel, 2011; Riehl, 1998), two of which were doctoral dissertations, and only one study ever conducted on Catholic school faculty meetings in particular, which was a Master's thesis (Pisaneschi, 1967). Though limited in number and scope, these studies nevertheless suggest that, when used effectively, faculty meetings may offer a viable means of uniting teachers around the work of school improvement.

Brandenburg (2008) studied four high-achieving public elementary schools with a particular focus on teacher perceptions. While finding a number of barriers to effective meetings, including a continued dominance of faculty meetings by principal-delivered information items, Brandenburg nevertheless found a high degree of teacher participation focused on school improvement. Such was also the case in Pisaneschi's (1967) study surveying teachers in 41 Catholic elementary schools, where there was clearly a stronger emphasis on information-sharing in faculty meetings, but where teachers nevertheless found opportunities for professional growth and development. However, Michel's (2011) study of three middle- and high-performing Texas schools found that, even when faculty meetings have a focus on professional development or school improvement, teachers still often felt disempowered to control the content or direction of faculty meetings and were largely passive in their participation.

Brandenburg (2008) noted that some of the variance in effective faculty meetings could be explained by schools where principals and faculty members who engaged in formal training and norm setting in effective meeting conduct experienced more satisfying and productive meetings. This suggests the quality of faculty meetings can be improved with intentional effort, findings are consistent with an ever-growing body of practitioner-oriented literature emphasizing the need for faculty meetings to be more focused on teacher learning and student achievement, be co-planned by teachers and

administrators, and include opportunities for participant engagement (Caramanico, 2013; Currie, 2013; Houck, 2012; Jackson, 2013; Menard, 2010; Price, 2012).

None of this literature established meaningful differences in the conduct of faculty meetings between high- and low-performing schools, but it did suggest that regardless of performance level, schools would benefit from a more intentional use of faculty meetings to accomplish their goals. This case study makes an important contribution to research literature, not only because it explored faculty meetings in a Catholic school, but does so with the dual emphasis on both faith identity and academic excellence. The faculty meetings in this study, as in the empirical literature described above, were predetermined periods of time when the school's certified staff assembled to pray, communicate, collaborate, and engage in shared decision making.

Engagement Theory

This case study drew, in part, from Macey and Schneider's (2008) work with employee engagement. The Employee Engagement Model sheds light on the structure and lived experience of the phenomena of the faculty meeting in this particular context. Macey and Schneider defined employee engagement as "a desirable condition that has an organizational purpose and connotes involvement, commitment, passion, enthusiasm, focused effort, and energy" (p. 4). The framework includes three facets for understanding the elements of employee engagement: (a) trait engagement, (b) state engagement, and (c) behavioral engagement. Their conceptual model of engagement served as a framework for analyzing data from Research Question 3 of this study, which examined ways in which teachers experienced engagement during faculty meetings at the case study school.

Purpose of the Study

While limited in scope, research literature suggests that faculty meetings might serve as a conduit to creating participant-centered learning environments where the daily challenges faced by schools, including perhaps the promotion of Catholic identity and the advancement of academic excellence, can be addressed. Based on this empirical research and Sexton's (1991) assertion that research on faculty meetings should include factors gleaned from teachers' perspectives, a need exists for further research adding to the current base of knowledge on Catholic school faculty meetings.

This case study was conducted using a phenomenological approach by "questioning the structure and essence of lived experience" (Rossman & Ral-

lis, 2012, p. 6) of teachers and administrators who participate in faculty meetings in one high-performing Catholic school. Purposive sampling was used to identify the school, which was chosen based on the following criteria: (a) an "A" school designated by the Indiana Department of Education through the 2011-2012 A-F School Accountability Rating System, (b) an elementary school defined as a school that includes grades K-8, and (c) a school in which the current administrator has served as principal for the previous two consecutive school years. Data for this study were extensive and were drawn from four sources: an open-ended questionnaire, interviews, observation, and artifact review.

Research Questions

A central research question framed this study: What role do faculty meetings play in the life of a high-performing Catholic elementary school?

Additional sub-questions included the following:
- RQ1: How do faculty meetings contribute to the sense of Catholic "identity" of the school?
- RQ2: How do faculty meetings contribute to the academic improvement of the school?
- RQ3: How does engagement of faculty within the faculty meeting contribute to the Catholic identity and academic improvement of the school?

Significance

This study makes a unique contribution to an under-researched area of education. Practitioners have seen a robust interest in the topic of faculty meetings (Caramanico, 2013; Currie, 2013; Houck, 2012; Jackson, 2013; Menard, 2010; Price, 2012). However, the current wave of practitioners writing on this topic includes a limited number of teachers, and the voice of the teacher needs to be heard through a research-based study. This study was unique in exploring this phenomenon in a Catholic school. The representation of Catholic schools in research literature is important due to the unique perspective of teachers who share similar ideas about culture and engage in a strong sense of community with shared values and beliefs (Sergiovanni, 1996). School administrators will be more likely to positively impact instructional quality by developing communities of practice in which teachers share goals, work, and responsibility for student outcomes (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008). This research provides school administrators as well as teachers the unique window to see, hear, and understand the viewpoint of the teachers in relation

to their own experiences of faculty meetings. The research findings, when applied to their own understandings, strengthen the literature on the identity of Catholic schools, their academic culture, and particularly in how faculty meetings can facilitate school improvement goals.

Methodology

This qualitative case study explored teachers' perceptions of faculty meetings in one high-performing Catholic elementary school using an open-ended questionnaire, interviews, observation, and artifact review to understand how these meetings support academic improvement and Catholic identity within the school.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of Catholic school teachers on faculty meetings and to explore how faculty meetings engage teachers in the work of Catholic identity and school improvement. Qualitative design is consistent with understanding the lived experience of teachers in faculty meetings, which was the primary focus of this research (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

The Context: Pope Francis Elementary School

Creswell (2013) defined a *case study* as an approach that explores a real-life contemporary bounded system. This case study was conducted in a high-performing Catholic elementary school to increase the likelihood of establishing a clear connection between faculty meetings and teachers' unified efforts around school-wide goals like promoting Catholic identity and student achievement. The selection of this case began with dialogue with the superintendent of schools concerning her reflections and thoughts regarding the schools that meet the set criteria and their appropriateness for participation in this research. The rationale in the selection of a high-performing school receiving an A rating from the Indiana Department of Education provides a greater likelihood of observing the phenomena in question (Hackman, 1990). The researchers continued to narrow the case selection by reviewing the websites of the schools that contained further histories of the schools, awards, school newsletters, and connections with their parish. The identified school was then contacted to conduct a preliminary interview with the principal to assess interest in participation. Pope Francis Elementary School (PFES; a pseudonym) is housed in a stone building constructed in 1948. Although it is

surrounded by an urban public school district, the school is located in a residential area; a public elementary school is directly adjacent to the Catholic school. The staff of 29 teachers serves students mostly from the surrounding neighborhood.

For the academic year 2013-2014, the school's student complement included 449 students in kindergarten through eighth grade. Of these, 98% were Catholic; an overwhelming majority of the Catholic students also attended the local parish with which the school is affiliated. Of the students who graduated in 2012, 87% enrolled in a Catholic high school for the academic year 2012-2013. Thirty-seven students were considered to have a disability and were assigned an Individual Educational Plan (I.E.P.) or a 504 Plan. An exceptional needs teacher assists 90 students weekly to address their special needs.

PFES is considered a high-performing school, as determined by the Indiana Department of Education's 2011-2012 A-F School Accountability Grading System. The metrics used to assign A through F letter grades to each accredited public and non-public school are based on student performance in a given year and improvement of performance from previous years. PFES was designated as an "A" school due to its exemplary progress through performance and improvement in English/Language Arts and Math. The school also was recognized in 2005 by the United States Department of Education as 1 of 11 schools in Indiana to be identified as a No Child Left Behind – Blue Ribbon School. The school's principal credited the exemplary status of the school to the teachers, students, and parents and the partnership that exists among them.

Data Collection

Data for this study were collected from an open-ended questionnaire administered to all faculty members in the school, interviews with the principal and a purposively-selected group of teachers, an observation of a faculty meeting, and a review of artifacts associated with the school's faculty meetings from the previous year.

Open-ended questionnaire. Each certified teacher (classroom teachers including fine arts teachers) employed at the school was provided the opportunity to respond to an open-ended structured questionnaire that solicited teachers' perceptions of faculty meetings at their school (see Appendix A). The questionnaire was developed with the research questions as the basis of inquiry. The researchers field tested the questionnaire with a Catholic elemen-

tary school faculty that met the criteria in the sample (except location) to seek feedback and clarification of purpose for each question.

    Interviews. Patterns and themes (Saldaña, 2013) that emerged from the questionnaire guided the development of interview protocols. The school principal provided a set of criteria (years of experience, years taught at the current school, and grade/subject taught) that assisted with the identification of teachers for the interviews. Eight teachers were purposively chosen from primary, intermediate, and middle school grade levels including a range of experience from 2 to 27 years (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Experience

Participant	Position	YE	YE-CE	YE-PFCES
Amy	Principal	35	35	5
Alicia	Intermediate	9	9	9
Kimberly	Primary	27	27	20
Ladonna	Specialized	2	2	2
Mana	Specialized	13	13	13
Karl	Middle	30	29	22
Jenaya	Intermediate	17	17	4
Elijah	Primary	23	6	6
Samuel	Middle	5	5	5

Note. YE: Years of Experience in Education; YE-CE: Years of Experience in Catholic Education; YE-PFCES: Years of Experience at Pope Francis Catholic Elementary School

    The interview questions followed a protocol in which open-ended questions were used, avoided asking leading questions, probed issues in depth, and allowed the informant to lead (Creswell, 1994). The interview questions were the same as the open-ended questionnaire; however, follow-up probes, which were based on patterns gleaned from the questionnaire results, provided an in-depth and richer insight into the study of faculty meetings in this particular school. Included in the interview questions were two lists about Catholic

identity and school improvement provided to the participant to stimulate the conversation (see Appendices B and C). The lists consisted of key terms that emerged from the literature on the nature of Catholic identity and academic improvement. Finally, interviewed teachers also responded to an engagement scale assessing their level of engagement of their principal, themselves, and the faculty as a whole during faculty meetings (See Appendix D).

Observation. The researchers conducted an observation of a faculty meeting at the case study school. The meeting took place in a classroom after school on a day in January. The researchers took observation notes, including scripting of some participant conversations. Interviews and artifact reviews confirmed that the setting, agenda, and tone for this meeting were typical for the case study school.

Artifact Review. Triangulation strengthened the credibility and rigor of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) and occurred after administration of the open-ended questionnaire and interviews, as the researcher collected and analyzed documentation of previous faculty meetings: agendas, handouts, and minutes of the meetings. The relationship of the documents to the emerging patterns from the questionnaire and the interviews within the scope of the research questions were explored.

Trustworthiness

Throughout the study, Merriam's (1991) eight strategies for promoting trustworthiness were maintained: (a) triangulation; (b) member checks; (c) peer review/examination; (d) researcher's position or reflexivity; (e) adequate engagement in data collection; (f) maximum variation; (g) audit trail; and (h) rich, thick descriptions. Triangulation occurred by utilizing multiple data sources. Participants in the interview process were provided transcripts to ensure accuracy of statements (member checks). Both interview questions and the open-ended questionnaire were subjected to a peer review examination by a committee of Catholic school teachers and principals for clarity and purpose. Maximum variation was used in the selection of participants to be interviewed. Teachers were purposively chosen at various stages of their career and at various grade levels. Teacher's length of time served at the school location also was a factor. An audit trail was maintained throughout all stages of the research process, which allowed for a rich, thick description of the results.

Data Analysis

Qualitative research may not be mathematical in nature; it is, however, systematic in its approach to analysis (Creswell, 1994). An iterative pattern of coding was utilized to analyze data in this study. Incidents or data were compared to other incidents or data during the process of coding, and codes were revised accordingly (Saldaña, 2013).

Miles et al. (2014) identified the three streams of data analysis included in this case study: (a) Data Condensation, (b) Designing Displays, and (c) Drawing and Verifying Conclusions. Data Condensation refers to "the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and/or transforming the data that appear in the full corpus (body) of written-up field notes, interview transcripts, documents and other empirical materials" (Miles et al., p. 12). The analysis included matrices that accurately displayed the various categories of information gained from the study. Conclusions drawn from the study were verified by the informants through member checks to ensure accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings.

A content analysis approach was used to study the documents. Patterns and themes were sought from the material in regard to the framework for this study. Data analysis from the questionnaire, interviews, and artifact review provided the material for a rich, descriptive summary of the findings.

Analysis for Research Question 3, which examined teacher engagement during faculty meetings, was grounded in Macey and Schneider's (2008) work with engagement of employees. The analysis included the three facets for understanding the elements of employee engagement: (a) trait engagement, (b) state engagement, and (c) behavioral engagement. Macey and Schneider interpreted the construct to include a few origins of both the attitudinal and behavioral components.

Findings

Artifact reviews and the researcher's own observation suggest that PF-CES had an established rhythm and flow to each faculty meeting. The faculty meets once a month, typically the last Wednesday. Due to the size of the faculty (29 certified teachers) and the limited number of assembly spaces within the school, the meetings are held in the middle school science classroom, which is larger than most classrooms. Teachers begin arriving and are greeted

with snacks and drinks, encouraging them to socialize until the meeting begins. The principal starts the meeting and invites everyone to pray together. Following the prayer, a short summary of any business items is shared with the faculty. After the prayer and summary, the remainder of the meeting focuses on professional development. According to the interviews, the meetings begin at 3:15 pm and end promptly at 4:15 pm.

Data from the open-ended questionnaires, interviews, and artifacts reveal numerous ways that faculty meetings engage teachers and function to enhance the school's Catholic identity, and keep a focus on academic achievement.

Faculty Meetings and Catholic Identity (RQ1)

Observations, open-ended questionnaires administered to faculty members, and interviews with the principal and purposively-selected teachers revealed three key ways that Catholic identity figured into faculty meetings at Pope Francis Elementary:

1. Signs of Catholic culture were visible within the physical environment of the faculty meeting.
2. Faculty meetings provided teachers opportunities for prayer.
3. Faculty meetings provided teachers opportunities for catechesis and to discuss strategies for sharing faith with students.

Signs of Catholic Culture. The Principal noted the existence of a prayer center in each classroom (where faculty meetings typically took place), as well as a crucifix hanging on the wall. "We have a prayer center in each classroom," she said, "but I do not typically reference the prayer center during the meeting…We have a crucifix in every classroom as well." The teachers who were interviewed verified that visible symbols of faith are present throughout the school and during faculty meetings when asked to circle items on the Catholic Identity Worksheet. Samuel, a teacher who identified himself as Christian but not Catholic, affirmed that "coming together in the [classroom for faculty meetings] helps me strengthen my own Christian identity…it is a place of worship." Jenaya, another teacher, stated, "If a speaker or parent is present, they [sic] see this [prayer space, crucifix, praying together] and it shows them why we are here."

Prayer. A word frequency query of all data collected in NVivo 10 (a qualitative software program) resulted in the word "prayer" ranking third overall, following "faculty" and "meeting." A plethora of data emerged to support the

second theme: Faculty meetings provide teachers opportunities for prayer. Data (see Table 2) from the Catholic Identity Worksheet (see Appendix B) display the responses from interviewed teachers that provide evidence of the quality and quantity of prayer that exist within the faculty meetings.
Note. Each participant who was interviewed was invited to circle any prompt on the worksheet that he or she experienced within the faculty meeting in the last two years.

Table 2

Catholic Identity Worksheet Data Display

Prompt	Elijah	Amy	Samuel	Jenaya	Karl	Mana	Ladonna	Kimberly	Alicia
Prayer to begin meeting	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Prayer intentions	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Catholic Prayers	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Heart Prayers	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Liturgical Prayers	X	X			X		X		

Note. Each participant who was interviewed was invited to circle any prompt on the worksheet that he or she experienced within the faculty meeting in the last two years.

The open-ended questionnaire and individual interviews provided rich data in regard to how the faculty meeting invites teachers to pray. All teachers indicated on the open-ended questionnaire that all meetings open with a prayer. While item 2 of the questionnaire specifically inquired about Catholic identity and the faculty meeting, question 1 simply invited the participants to describe what happens in a faculty meeting. The majority of responses to question 1 described how the meeting begins with prayer, for example:. "Prayer." "Faculty meetings begin with prayer usually directed by the principal. And then a call for faculty prayer intentions." "Always starts with a prayer." "We pray, of course, at the beginning [of the meeting]."

Question 2, from the open-ended questionnaire, had similar responses as question 1 (see responses following the numerical references below) and provided rich data in regard to how the faculty prayed together:

Teachers elaborated on the connection between prayer and the faculty meetings:

OE 008-2: The meeting always begins with prayer/scripture. Prayers are given for individuals, faculty, family, and students. I see the goal of the meeting as a way to reflect, extend, and share our faith with one another and our students.

OE 009-2: The petitions requested at the beginning of the meeting are reflections of our school's Catholic identity. Frequently, someone will share information about someone who is struggling with health or other issues at this time. Just recently, a teacher was in the hospital for treatments and a teacher who had just visited shared with everyone an update on her condition.

Catechesis. Data revealed numerous examples and purposeful action steps taken in faculty meetings to ensure a strong, vibrant Catholic identity through catechesis.

Data from the open-ended questionnaire suggested that faculty meetings serve a critical role in the school's catechetical mission:

OE 004-2: When faculty meetings touch the core of our teacher brain and interaction with students then the meeting has value. Spiritual growth is imperative to our growth as Catholic school teachers.

OE 006-2: We pray, we discuss Catholic values and current events, and receive updates on diocesan news.

OE 010-2: Teaching strategies always involve how to weave Catholic identity into teaching. Also, how teaches already utilize Catholic identity strategies in the classroom.

Meeting agendas and committee reports also revealed numerous topics related to faith formation, including changes to the new missal, ACRE (Assessment of Children/Youth in Religious Education) testing, liturgy planning, Catholic Schools Week, and so on.

In sum, data from multiple sources showed how faculty meetings at Pope Francis Elementary were intentionally used to promote Catholic identity

through prayer, catechetical sharing and discussion, and through the physical environment of the room itself.

Faculty Meetings and Academic Improvement (RQ2)

The second research question explored the ways in which faculty meetings at Pope Francis Elementary fostered an emphasis on academic achievement. During the first round of coding, more than 90 codes were identified related to academic improvements. Through the processes of sorting and sifting while isolating patterns and processes, two key themes emerged relative to faculty meetings and academic improvement:

1. Faculty meetings served as the catalyst in developing, discussing, and reviewing school improvement plans.
2. Faculty meetings provided opportunities for professional development which facilitated new learning for the teachers.

Collaborating on school improvement initiatives. PFES ensured academic success by developing an annual school improvement plan that reflected the results of both formative and summative assessments. The plan reflected a desire to implement standards that were rigorous and relevant. Professional development was extensive and tied directly to the school improvement plan. Interviews indicated that attention to students on both ends of the academic spectrum were addressed. The Academic Improvement Worksheet (see Table 3) utilized during the interviews highlighted the areas of focus of the administration and faculty relative to topics covered in the school improvement plan.

Table 3

Academic Improvement Worksheet Data Display

Prompt	Elijah	Amy	Samuel	Jenaya	Karl	Mana	Ladonna	Kimberly	Alicia
Test Scores (ISTEP+)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
ISTEP+: Pass/Pass+	X	X			X	X	X	X	X
Test Scores (IREAD)	X	X			X	X		X	X
Common Core Standards	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
A-F IN Report Card	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X

Note. Each participant who was interviewed was invited to circle any prompt on the worksheet that was on the agenda of a faculty meeting in the last two years.

Individual teacher interviews also provided evidence that the school improvement plan was regularly discussed, developed, and reviewed within faculty meetings. Mana, a teacher, explained,

> The principal has it down to a science as to what each faculty meeting should be…Faculty meetings are incredibly beneficial to the growth of our school and students…the school improvement is plan is reviewed.

Open-ended questionnaire results confirmed these findings in the topics teachers described from typical faculty meetings:

> OE 007-3: Amy [the principal] shares test data to help us understand results.

> OE 008-3: Faculty meetings focus on academic improvement. Noting NWEA and ISTEP results in order to challenge academic growth in students. Instruction for implementing the Common Core and utilization of sites available for student enrichment in this area.

Professional Development and New Learning. There was a strong emphasis on teacher learning at PFES, and the faculty meeting was the primary vehicle for professional development. Amy, the Principal, stated, "If you bring educators together, they should walk out with new knowledge."

The teacher interviews provided an in depth understanding of this theme. Teacher Alicia discussed professional development:

> I have appreciated this…to learn something new. I think I can use the information in my own teaching in a beneficial way. I have appreciated the time spent on Common Core. Technology is important to learn what is new and current. This year is more purposeful…I find more meaning. Give me some strategies in my classroom…techniques with high ability students.

Samuel described the role of guest speakers during faculty meetings:

> New educational theories, models are shared…Speakers come and talk on specific topics. Recently someone..presented on children's behavior

and how to manage it. We also had SmartBoard technology [training] and using it as a tool in the classroom. The concept of flipping the classroom was presented and the speaker was great.

The Principal affirmed, "Something new must be presented [at meetings]. If not, I have failed them."

Faculty Meetings and Engagement of Faculty (RQ 3)
When analyzing the data using a tree map in NVivo 10, the following descriptive words emerged: engagement, engaged, share, community, feel, learning, communication, enjoy, heart, involved, and open. In the process of sorting and shifting data, two key themes emerged regarding the role of faculty engagement in meetings:
1. Faculty meetings serve as a conduit to creating participant-centered learning environments.
2. Faculty meetings serve as a conduit to creating community among teachers.

Participant-centered learning environment. Results of the Engagement Scale activity (see Figure 1), in which teachers rated the typical level of engagement of themselves, the principal, and the rest of the faculty during meetings, emphasized engagement as a behavioral trait (Macey & Schneider, 2008).

The participants overwhelmingly placed the principal in the category of being fully engaged. Participants also placed themselves to some degree as engaged in the meeting and felt their level was more than or equal to the peers. Interestingly, only one participant, Kimberly, gauged the faculty higher than herself. In interviews, teachers reported that a small number of faculty members are typically off-task or unengaged in meetings, and this was the chief reason for rating themselves as more engaged than the faculty as a whole.
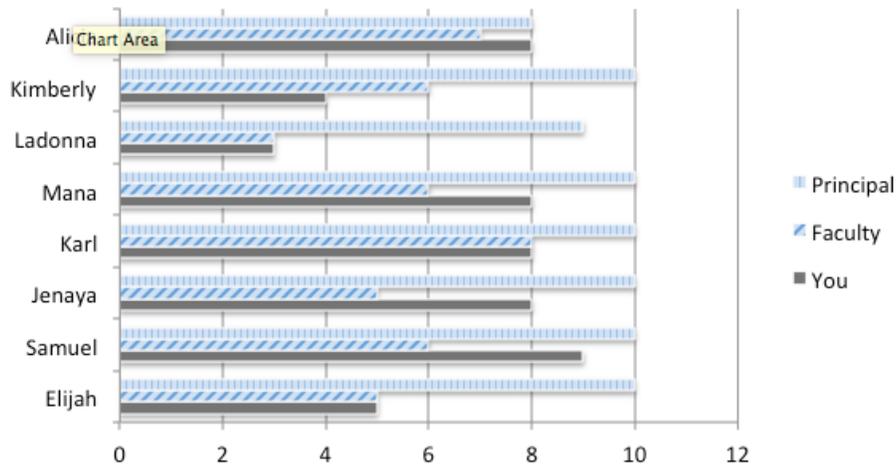
Figure 1. Engagement scale activity results

The open-ended questionnaire and the observation of a faculty meeting provided a wealth of evidence to support this finding:

> OE006-4: I am quite engaged at our meetings. We almost always learn a valuable new skill or a new way of looking at an old procedure.

> OE 011-3: We have a richly diverse (personality) faculty and any exchange with any one of them enriches me. I benefit from their willingness to share what works for them.

> OE 001-4: I feel a sense of engagement when working in small groups to share ideas.

> OE 010-4: Examples are given to show different strategies, which gives me a sense of engagement. Allow the teacher a voice gives a sense of engagement.

Thus data from faculty meetings at Pope Francis Elementary School suggest that teachers are engaged at the trait, state, and behavior levels described in Macey and Schneider's employee engagement model (2008).

Community among the faculty. The open-ended questionnaire, observations from the faculty meeting, and individual interviews provided evidence that faculty meetings serve to foster a sense of community among teachers.

During an observed faculty meeting, teachers entered the classroom and began talking with one another immediately. As teachers helped themselves to refreshments, they engaged in conversation. Data from interviews suggested teachers have few opportunities for adult interaction during the school day, and so they seemed to welcome the chance to socialize in the faculty meeting setting. Conversations between and among teachers lessened during the presentation of the speaker, and for a few teachers the conversations continued after the meeting.

Teacher Ladonna shared that it's "nice to all be in one room…[we] do not get to see everyone [outside of meeting settings]." Samuel said in regard to seeing other teachers throughout the day, "Some I never get to see!" Teacher Karl summarized, "We are a close staff." Jenaya agreed: "We take care of one another."

Trait and psychological state engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008) also were evident within the PFES faculty meetings. The faculty displayed some form of absorption, attachment, and enthusiasm for the meeting and the content being presented (trait engagement). When asked for her final thoughts at the end of her interview, Mana explained, "I like our faculty meetings!" Samuel shared, "I enjoy the faculty meetings. I look forward to them. Also, it is an opportunity to get us all together and in one place." The majority of the teachers viewed the meetings as positive and were conscientious (psychological state engagement) in obtaining new knowledge and skills for the betterment of the students they served. At the conclusion of an observed faculty meeting, one teacher exclaimed, "This is really helpful!" Jenaya summarized, "I know they're important…I know they are necessary."

Discussion and Implications

Findings from this study offer a variety of implications for principals, teachers, and others interested in conducting effective faculty meetings, and for researchers who study school improvement, Catholic schools, or group dynamics in educational settings. While this study focused on a Catholic school, public and private school administrators and teachers benefit from better understanding the role and capacity of faculty meetings for building staff unity and a focus on school improvement.

Implications for educators. Principals and teachers should review their current practices for conducting faculty meetings in light of this study. Utilizing McGrath's (1964) Model for Group Effectiveness, educators should reflect on all three phases of the meeting: (a) input (what to do before the meeting),

(b) process (what should happen during the meeting), and (c) outcome (what should happen after the meeting). Educators should additionally evaluate the three facets for understanding the elements of employee engagement (Macey & Schneider, 2008): (a) trait engagement, (b) state engagement, and (c) behavioral engagement.

A survey of best practices could serve as a tool to collect data to evaluate those elements of effective meeting planning that are fully present, sometimes present, or rarely present. Utilizing the findings from this study, a Catholic school could begin by facilitating a group discussion on how to improve the faculty meeting. The principal or facilitator would ask each teacher prior to the meeting to reflect on each theme or pattern emerged from the Pope Francis Elementary case study, and what elements of Catholic identity, school improvement, and participant engagement characterize faculty meetings in their own school. A table discussion would be the first step in sharing feedback and arriving at consensus statements. Each table could share their statements, and the facilitator would lead the group to consensus statements that would be true for the larger group. The agreed upon statements could provide clarity on what aspects of the school's faculty meetings are effective and what needs to be changed to ensure the faculty meetings are productive and engaging.

Implications for researchers. This study contributes to the literature on theories of engagement, group effectiveness, and Catholic identity in Catholic schools. The results suggest a number of important directions for future research studies. Research questions limited this study to one high-performing Catholic elementary school. Would the findings be any different in a lower-performing Catholic school? Non-Catholic school contexts should be considered in future studies and quantitative studies of faculty meetings might also yield a stronger empirical understanding of the typical faculty meeting patterns and the extent to which, at least in educator perceptions, they contribute to the life of the school. Future studies should also explore this topic in Catholic secondary schools, which may exhibit different group dynamics. The principal featured in this case study had prior experience in a diocesan program to attract teachers to the profession and train them how to be effective in classroom. Further research could explore the importance of principal preparation in relationship to conducting effective faculty meetings. Studies should explore how activities in faculty meetings translate into changes in teaching practice. And, finally, future studies could better define the term engagement and delve deeper into the concept of how teachers are engaged within faculty meetings.

Conclusion

Faculty meetings are rare opportunities when a school administrator has an audience with all certified teachers should be considered a time of great value and importance. The promotion of Catholic identity and school improvement are cornerstones for all interaction that occurs within these meetings.

This study demonstrated how Catholic identity is cultivated in school faculty meetings by experiences in faith, knowledge, and service. Through community prayer, scripture, and reflection faculty meetings reinforced faith in Jesus Christ as a central focus for the school. Formal instruction in the faith during faculty meetings led to a clearer understanding of Church teachings and the application of faith to participants' lives. Faith and knowledge must bring disciples to service. The faculty meeting is an arena where the faculty can discuss, plan, and evaluate their commitment to service to those who are most in need.

The term "school improvement" includes providing professional development, addressing school-wide issues, and promoting school success. Faculty meetings described in this case study served as a venue to introduce new learning and instructional techniques that assisted the teachers in their abilities to effectively deliver the curriculum to their students. School-wide issues are best resolved through open conversations with all teachers. Faculty meetings allowed for input from all grade-level perspectives and, through the use of consensus building, a plan to address the school-wide issues were implemented and monitored. Finally, school improvement includes the promotion of school successes. Faculty meetings at Pope Francis Elementary School allowed teachers a place to share strategies that are working in their classrooms.

This study contributes to empirical research on faculty meetings, research that is exiguous, especially considering the ubiquity of such meetings and the time school administrators and teachers spend in this activity. As the principal of PFES emphasized: "The hour is precious and you have to honor it!"

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APPENDIX A: Teacher Open-Ended Questionnaire

Project Title: Catholic School Faculty Meetings: A Case Study Linking Catholic Identity, School Improvement, and Teacher Engagement
Project: 550861-1
Approved: January 9, 2014

Please answer the following questions:
1. Describe what happens in your faculty meetings.
2. In what ways, if any, do your faculty meetings reflect the Catholic identity of your school? Please provide examples.
3. What, if anything, occurs in your faculty meetings that contribute to the academic improvement of students or the improvement of your teaching practice? Please provide examples.
4. Please describe how you feel a sense of engagement, if at all, in your faculty meetings?

APPENDIX B: Catholic Identity Worksheet

Participants in the interview were asked about the Catholic identity of their faculty meetings. The list below was provided to prompt discussions in the area of Catholic identity.

- Prayer to begin meeting
- Prayer to end meeting
- Prayer Intentions shared by faculty
- Catholic Prayers – (e.g. Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory Be)
- Heart Prayers – (prayers shared from the heart – not formally written)
- Reflections – (time allotted to reflect on prayer)
- Readings from the Bible
- Liturgically appropriate prayers (e.g. Advent, Lent, Easter, etc…)
- Time for Sharing – (personal)
- Catholic songs are sung/played – (as part of a prayer service or reflection time)
- Service – organize/participate in a service project as a faculty
- Mission – Is the school mission statement reviewed/discussed?
- Prayer Table is centrally located in the room
- A crucifix is prominently displayed
- Catechesis – formal instruction in the Catholic faith
- Technology – (e.g. You Tube videos, websites, blogs, etc. shared on Catholic identity)

APPENDIX C: School Improvement Worksheet

- Remediation
- Test Scores – ISTEP+
- Test Scores – ISTEP+ (Pass vs. Pass Plus)
- Test Scores - IREAD
- Test Score Interpretations
- School Improvement Plan
- Indiana Curriculum Standards
- Common Core State Standards
- Accommodations
- Modifications
- Growth Model
- High Ability Students
- Technology applications
- A-F Accountability Report Card
- Dibels
- Parent/Teacher Communication
- Frequent Monitoring/Formative Assessment
- Subject content
- Teaching strategies
- Time on tasks

APPENDIX D: Engagement Scale

Participants in the interview, were asked three questions concerning level of engagement within the faculty meeting. The scales provided gave participants a range to categorize their remarks.

Your level of engagement in faculty meetings:

1……..2……....3…..…..4…..…..5……....6…..…..7……8……….9…....10

Minimal Engagement   Engagement   Fully Engaged

Faculty's level of engagement in faculty meetings:

1……..2……....3…..…..4…..…..5……....6…..…..7……8……….9…....10

Minimal Engagement   Engagement   Fully Engaged

The principal's level of engagement in faculty meetings:

1……..2……....3…..…..4…..…..5……....6…..…..7……8……….9……..10

Minimal Engagement   Engagement   Fully Engaged