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Using Communities of Practice to Support At-Home Gospel Learning from a Release Time Seminary Classroom

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USING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE TO SUPPORT
AT-HOME GOSPEL LEARNING FROM A
RELEASE-TIME SEMINARY CLASSROOM

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Dissertation

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education
at the University of Kentucky

By

Nicholas A. Davis

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, Professor of Educational Leadership Studies

Lexington, KY

2022

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

USING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE TO SUPPORT
AT-HOME GOSPEL LEARNING FROM A
RELEASE-TIME SEMINARY CLASSROOM

This mixed-methods action research study examines the effect of communities of practice on the development of home-centered gospel learning activities from the perspective of twelve release-time Seminary teachers for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from October—December 2021. Beginning in 2019, leaders of Seminaries and Institutes began to implement a Churchwide initiative to encourage home-centered, Church-supported gospel learning. Although Seminary leaders have made several systemwide adjustments, teachers have commonly made minimal adjustments to support this approach.

Throughout the mixed-methods study, participants learned about the importance of this home-centered gospel learning approach, in addition to principles of design thinking and successful communities of practice. In both their communities of practice and monthly faculty inservice meetings, study participants discussed what they had done to encourage a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel-learning approach and how effective they felt those efforts were. It appears that the process of design thinking and communities of practice greatly enhanced the teachers' ability to positively reinforce home-centered gospel learning experiences within the lives of their students.

KEYWORDS: Home-Centered Learning, Communities of Practice, Design Thinking, Action Research, Religious Education

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Nicholas A. Davis

April 23, 2022
Date

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USING COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE TO SUPPORT
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By

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Date

DEDICATION

To my loving and supportive wife, my kids, and my God.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my Heavenly Father for His guidance and direction, both in starting this journey and taking steps along the path. He has sustained and strengthened both me and my family and cared for them in ways that I could not throughout this challenging, yet wonderful, experience.

For my wife, Dani, who faithfully supported me through long days and nights. She has carried a heavy load with the three children that started this journey with us and the two additional ones that came to our family throughout it. She has selflessly put so many of her personal desires and interests on hold to support me throughout this degree. Even though my name is on the diploma, hers deserves to be as well. I love her with all my heart.

My kids: Ryan, Edie, Ruth, Grant, and Caleb. Thank you for letting daddy do homework, even when it meant spending less time with you. I hope that this inspires you each to trust God and know that anything is possible. I look forward to the games we'll play, the parks we'll visit, and the experiences we'll have together.

For my chair, Tricia Browne-Ferrigno, who has been a friend, to both me and my family, and an astute academic advisor. I have appreciated her perspective both regarding both the development of my dissertation and in life. I am grateful to have learned more about my field of study, to have developed a sweet friendship, and to have emerged a better person. Also to my committee members: Mary John O'Hair, Maria Cahill, and Justin Bathon. Each of you have helped me to build a better dissertation and helped bless my life in seemingly small, yet very meaningful, ways. You have taught me how to show someone high love and high expectations.

For my other family and friends, both named and unnamed, thank you. I believe that almost every major accomplishment in someone's life, and this is no exception, is the result of the contribution of many who stood in the wings. Although they may not have entered the stage, they nonetheless played a vital role in the production. That is how I feel. Thank you for your support of me and my family, your faith and prayers, and your kind understanding, especially during these last few months. We truly see God's hands in your thoughtfulness, care, and concern.

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DIAGNOSIS PHASE

Learning does not happen exclusively in schools. Students often learn in collaboration with other students and family members outside of a classroom. Even though parental support typically decreases when children become adolescents, studies have consistently linked parental involvement to academic achievement (Cheung, 2019), even among adolescents (Veas, Castejón, Miñano, Gilar-Corbí, 2019). However, not all modes of parental involvement [PI] are equal because "the strength of the association [between PI and academic achievement] depends on the form of PI being investigated" (Anthony & Ogg, 2019, p. 376). Examining the relationship between three types of parental involvement (i.e., home-based involvement, school-based involvement, home-school communication) has shown that the largest and most consistent gains result from home-based parental involvement.

To enhance student learning and maximize their academic gains, educators and parents should partner together (Christensen, 2004; Deslandes & Barma, 2016). This union, focused on ensuring each student learns the most important things, requires trust between both the teacher and the parent. This trust is commonly built through communication and it grows particularly well within a climate where teachers report positive improvements over time (Deslandes & Barma, 2016). Studies have shown that the most effective parents utilize authoritative parenting styles wherein they support increased autonomy as their children grow and mature (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Kreider, Daspe, Kennedy, & Weiss, , 2007; Shute,UnHansen, Undersoo, & Razzouk,

2011; Spera, 2005).

These ideals inform this study that explores and assesses strategies used to stimulate more effective at-home gospel learning among high-school aged youth attending schools sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, specifically those within a release-time Seminary classroom. In this chapter, I describe the context of my study, including the shareholders involved and the problem that this study addresses. Additionally, this chapter presents specific research questions that guide this study and describes strategies used to explore the research problem according to the mixed-methods action research (MMAR) study framework developed by Ivankova (2015). Simply, this chapter diagnoses the overarching problem of practice and provides a brief overview of relevant literature surrounding the topic.

Study Context

Since its beginning in 1912 at Granite Seminary, the Seminary program has expanded to become a worldwide endeavor (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2015). At the end of the 2020 school year, over 400,000 youth worldwide were participated in the Seminary program (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2021). The objective of these Seminary classes is to help youth "understand and rely on the teachings and Atonement of Jesus Christ, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families and others for eternal life with their Father in Heaven" (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2012, p. xi). Youth (ages 14-18) can participate in seminary during their final four years of high school (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020e). Although not a Church requirement for the

missionary service that many young adults within the Church choose to participate in, graduation from Seminary does satisfy the requirement established by some nations for these missionaries to have ministerial training prior to receiving a proselyting visa.

The curricula for the Seminary program focus on four books of scripture: (a) the *Old Testament*, (b) the *New Testament*, (c) the *Book of Mormon*, and (d) the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Students spend a year studying each of these four books. The order of these books is determined by the Come, Follow Me (CFM) program, not the student's grade level. High school students thus can study all four books during their four years, although the sequence differs, depending on their graduation year. Seminary teachers encourage these high school students are encouraged to study the scriptures both within the Seminary program and on their own. Across the world, youth commonly participate in Seminary during the early morning before their regular high school classes begin. This religious learning typically occurs in a local Church meetinghouse or in the home of a member of the congregation. In areas where there are high concentrations of Church members, Seminary buildings are often built near existing public high schools (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020b). No academic credit is received at the high school for this release-time period. Those that successfully complete each year of Seminary (i.e., reading assigned book, regularly attending class, completing other academic requirements) receive credit from the Church for that year. Each student that earns four years of credit and an ecclesiastical endorsement from a leader in their congregation is awarded a Seminary diploma (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020e).

Seminary Teacher Standards

Teaching standards for Seminary teachers are explained in the *Gospel Teaching and Learning Handbook* (2012). As a backdrop for teaching standards, Seminary teachers first review the objective of Seminaries and Institutes (S&I) and the three foci that help guide teachers in fulfilling that objective. First, teachers are expected to live what they teach, in the classroom, in their home, and in the community. Second, teachers should teach the scriptures "in a way that leads to understanding and edification" while concurrently helping "students fulfill their role in the learning process and prepare them to teach the gospel to others" (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2012, p. 6). Third, Seminary teachers are expected not only to teach but to fulfill their administrative responsibilities. This includes working with parents, Church leaders and students to encourage each youth to complete the Seminary competition requirements. In all of this, Seminary teachers should help to "assist parents in their responsibility to strengthen their families" (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2012, p. 8).

To clarify the responsibility of Seminary teachers, they are provided seven fundamentals that should guide learning approaches with their students. The first three fundamentals focus on the classroom environment that teachers should strive to create and emphasize scriptural teaching, whereas the last fundamental guides teachers in their selection of scriptural passages to include in classroom teaching. The middle three fundamentals are guidelines and expectations for both teacher and students: (a) "understand the context and content of the scriptures and words of the

prophets," (b) "identify, understand, feel the truth and importance of, and apply gospel

doctrines and principles," and (c) "explain, share, and testify of gospel doctrines and

principles" (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2012, p. 10). Within Seminary

vernacular, both "a" and "b" together are called the "Learning Pattern" (Seminaries

and Institutes of Religion Training Services, 2020). It is important to note that this is not

the sole responsibility of teachers. Rather, teachers and students are equally expected

to learn and contribute in these ways within the learning environment.

School-Based Seminary Classes

This study focuses on a release-time Seminary in Eagle Mountain, Utah. Within this

Seminary, sponsored by the Church and adjacent to a local public high school, there is a

principal, an assistant principal, a support specialist, nine full-time teachers, and two

part-time teachers. Although the principal and assistant principal have administrative

responsibilities, they still teach one and four classes, respectively. However, the

assistant principal teaches all his classes at a small, one-classroom Seminary located

near a local charter school. Each full-time teacher conducts six classes, while the two

part-time teachers teach two classes each, on an A/B schedule (i.e., alternate days of

the school week) using similar course materials.

The high school adjacent to the Seminary includes students in Grade 9 through

Grade 12 who attend classes on an alternating schedule. Each A-day or B-day consists of

four periods lasting 75-minutes each. The high school also has a daily homeroom class

for 20-minutes that all students are expected to attend. The homeroom curriculum

focuses on principles of character development. During homeroom, no students

participate in a Seminary class.

On A-days, two 75-minute Seminary classes are also held before school, which 60 high school students attend. About 30 other students participate in an online Seminary class taught by one of the 11 Seminary teachers. When students choose to participate in Seminary during the regular school-day, they inform their school counselor of their desire to have a Seminary-release period. During that period, students leave the high school campus and walk across the street to the Seminary. While at the Seminary, students in Grade 10 through Grade 12 are separated into classes largely at random. However, freshmen are commonly grouped together since they require a little more additional training with Seminary norms and procedures. There are also two adaptive needs classes, each with about seven or eight students apiece. Thus, approximately 1450 students are currently enrolled at the Seminary and participate either in a face-to-face or a virtual classroom.

Anecdotally, the release-time seminary teachers typically rely less on the published curricular manuals than early-morning volunteer teachers that teach at a local Church meetinghouse. A lot of this flows from the time that hired teachers must prepare, while the volunteer teachers teach as a service, in addition to their other professional, civic, or home responsibilities. All teachers should use the manual, as they have been instructed that "we first adopt and then we adapt" (Oaks et al., 2012). However, release-time teachers often use it more as a resource and less as a detailed lesson plan.

Home-Based Seminary Classes

Following a recent Church-wide initiative, the Seminary course materials and lesson plans were modified to support a new home-study program. This program, *Come, Follow Me—For Individuals and Families* (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020b), subdivided the four previously mentioned books of scripture into smaller segments, enabling individuals and families to study each of those books over a four-year period. To support the home-study program, selections of the Old Testament were provided rather than subdividing the reading of the entire book, due to its length in comparison to the other three books. Church lessons and activities during Sunday meetings should support and reinforce the material studied in homes over the previous week (Cook, 2018). Following this pattern, the Seminary curriculum was also readjusted to follow more closely the study schedule for CFM (Nelson, 2019; Nelson, Oaks, & Eyring, 2019).

Program Modification

Initially, the Seminary curricula were not perfectly aligned with CFM, since the public schools operate on a school-year calendar whereas this program revolved on a calendar-year schedule. To remedy this, Seminary and Church leaders instructed Seminary teachers to teach material in the classroom during the week that families would be studying those scriptural passages at home beginning in January 2021 (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020b). With this adjustment, seminary classes no longer strive to cover the entire book of scripture being studied. Rather, the classes now focus on the scriptural passages individuals and families are studying during the school year.

Families and other Church organizations will continue to be responsible for studying those passages that are included in CFM during the time that local secondary schools and Seminary are not in session (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020b).

Before this change, Seminary leaders instructed teachers to focus on helping each student understand what was being taught in the assigned scripture block, even if those verses were not discussed beyond that. Teachers would carefully select which verses they would emphasize, but they were instructed to cover or discuss all of them. With the adjustments to adhere to CFM, Seminary leaders have issued a directive that teachers should focus more on conversion, or a change in personal behavior and character (Smith, 1992), rather than coverage of the assigned scriptural passages (Webb, Bigelow, & Smith, 2021). This means that teachers now focus more on assuring that a few Gospel messages are well-understood and applied by Seminary students, while not mentioning other scriptural passages that are deemed less important for that learning experience.

Another structural adjustment that encouraged student-support of the home-centered CFM program also began in January 2021. A Seminary diploma is received in concert with scripture reading, attendance, and other Seminary-related academic measures. In 2020, the reading requirement was met if students read each of the passages in CFM prior to their Seminary graduation (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020a). The hope was that Seminary students would read those scripture passages when emphasized in CFM. However, I noticed that many students tended to read less at the beginning of a school year and more scripture as the deadline approached.

Beginning in January 2021, Seminary credit for each semester was awarded only if students "read in the current year's book of scripture at least 75 percent of the semester calendar days" (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020b). This subtle change shortened the distance between the invitation and follow-up, since students regularly reported their daily reading rather than their total reading after four years. This change also helped to reinforce more effectively the CFM approach.

Although the formal alignment of CFM and Seminaries was relatively rapid, Seminary curricula updates were gradual. In November 2020, leaders of S&I informed all personnel that Seminary pacing would be adjusted so that what was studied in CFM that week would also be studied in the Seminary classroom. Since CFM is organized according to a 12-month calendar, this would require significant adjustments to existing Seminary teacher manuals. Worldwide, public schools are typically open for nine months a year. However, their holiday schedules differ. In the northern hemisphere, schools are commonly out during the months of June, July, and August. In the southern hemisphere, schools commonly conclude during the second week in November and begin again during the second week in February. Since scripture studied during CFM would only be studied in Seminary if the public schools were in session during that time, additional Seminary curricula would be needed as curriculum writers prepared lessons for a 12-month calendar, even though teachers would only utilize 9 months of the material. Prior to this adjustment, updated seminary teacher manuals were originally scheduled to be released in January 2022 (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020b; Webb, 2019). When the shift to a 12-month teaching calendar occurred, this

delayed the release of new teacher manuals to January of 2023 (Seminary and Institutes Curriculum Department, 2021).

Stakeholders

Several key stakeholders in the organization have interest in this study. These include the area and region directors, Seminary principal, Seminary teachers, and ecclesiastical leaders. Although parents and students are stakeholders in the Seminary program, the Church did not approve their participation in this study, so I only focused on the perspectives of other stakeholders.

Area and Region Directors

The local regional director is responsible for the Seminaries associated with five local high schools and their feeder junior highs. The local area director has seven regions within his area. Getting the perspective of my region director and, if needed, my area director, are vital before implementing any action research study. The current regional director has two priorities: (a) increasing enrollment and (b) developing more effective teaching. To accomplish these priorities, the region director encouraged more meaningful collaboration with local ecclesiastical leaders, "gathering" activities where current seminary students can bring their friends, and other community outreach. Effective teaching has largely been defined by implementing the principles found within *The Gospel Teaching and Learning Handbook*. Positing this study within that framework has enhanced his interest in and support for this work.

Principal

The principal at the local Seminary is primarily responsible for how well the

Objective of S&I is accomplished at the Seminary. He works with the Seminary teachers, students, and parents, in addition to local ecclesiastical leaders. In training and supporting the teachers, the principal is responsible for weekly inservice events, individual professional growth plans developed collaboratively with each teacher, and regular classroom observations. The current principal focuses intently on the progress of students within the program. He spends much of his time visiting with seniors individually to encourage them in completing any make-up work and progressing satisfactorily toward a Seminary diploma. He also regularly coordinates with local ecclesiastical leaders, including a semi-annual meeting with several key leaders.

Teachers

Teachers are responsible for helping to facilitate learning within their classes. They focus on increasing enrollment and effective teaching, under the direction of the region director, principal, and local ecclesiastical leaders. Since teachers have a preparation period each day, they are encouraged to observe each other and commonly discuss ideas for different lessons, both during the school day and after school closes. In lieu of an attendance office, Seminary teachers also are responsible for noticing behavioral trends and addressing them with the student and his or her parents. They often have the most consistent direct contact with students and their families.

Ecclesiastical Leaders

The adjacent high school's boundaries contain many local congregations of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Each congregation, commonly called a

ward, is determined by geographic boundaries, and is led and guided by a bishop.

Clusters of 8 to 12 wards are grouped into *stakes*, which are also geographically

organized. These stakes are led by a presidency, composed of a president and two

counselors (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.-a). One of these

counselor's responsibilities commonly includes the Seminary. The location where this

study is conducted has 7 stakes and 70 wards within the boundaries supported by

this Seminary.

Since the Seminary program is designed to support the personal and religious

development of the enrolled youth, a local Church board of education has been

formed to coordinate local congregational and Seminary efforts. This local Church

board of education meets semi-annually and is chaired by an assigned stake

president, with representation from each stake presidency and local Seminary

leaders (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, n.d.-b). These meetings focus

on coordinating efforts to enroll youth from local wards in Seminary, discuss stake

graduation plans, and align other ward, stake, and Seminary efforts.

Researcher Role

I am an assistant principal at the Seminary where the study is conducted,

which gives me both teaching and administrative responsibilities. Giving priority to my

teacher role, two-thirds of my time is focused on direct involvement with students.

The remainder of my time is spent on administration. Administratively, my role is to

help the principal, which means that I provide a lot to support toward the training and

development of other teachers on the faculty. These teachers are the subject of my

study.

In this study, I fill two different roles. First, I facilitate conversations and discussions with the teachers in my building that focus on more effective ways to encourage home-centered, Seminary-supported learning. This happens in both formal and informal ways. Second, I become a participant observer, where I focus on what a teacher does in the classroom to encourage a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach among their students.

Problem of Practice

The problem of practice for this study centers on how the Seminary curriculum was restructured to align more closely with the CFM gospel study plan for individuals and families. Although Seminary leaders carefully detailed several structural changes intended to implement a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach, these changes have modified outcomes with little direction on how to adjust processes to accomplish those outcomes more effectively. Curricular adjustments have been made, although there are few supporting materials currently available to aid Seminary teachers in changing their approach to assure more effective home-centered learning. Within this study, I conduct research to explore how teachers can more effectively support the CFM curriculum through adjusted in-class instruction and invitations for home-centered scriptural studies.

Research Framework

The Mixed-Method Action Research Study (MMAR) designed by Ivankova (2015) is used to conduct this research in attempts to acquire more reliable results

through leveraging both quantitative and qualitative data. The MMAR model requires six distinct phases using an iterative process that produces findings to address the research questions. First, researchers *diagnose* a problem of practice for which shareholders desire to find a solution. The problem should be authentic and cause enough irritation that key organizational members are committed sufficiently to seek a viable solution. Once the authentic problem is defined, researchers enter a *reconnaissance* phase where they look for information to inform their decision about where and how to intervene. When *planning* the approach, researchers consider and carefully create established objectives and develop a plan of action. Once implemented, this plan of action should help to accomplish their objectives. *Acting* involves the implementation of the plan. After carrying out the plan, researchers conduct an *evaluation* using mixed-methods research, relying on both qualitative and quantitative data. This enables them to more completely evaluate the action and determine how effective it was in accomplishing the specified objectives. The situation is then *monitored* to help inform future research decisions and identify adjustments that could generate the desired results (Ivankova, 2015). For a visual description of this process, see Figure 1.1 below.

Diagnosis Phase

In the MMAR framework, researchers must first carefully diagnose the organizational dilemma before implementing an intervention. This is vital because accurate information invites quality decisions. The diagnosis phase not only helps to identify a potential problem, but it helps to identify the right problem—one that

Figure 1.1

Diagnosing

Identify a problem of practice about which shareholders desire to find a solution.

Monitoring

Continuing to track the effects of the approach to consider if additional action research studies should be conducted.

Reconnaissance

Seeking for information that will help to inform and improve the intervention, to address the problem of practice.

Evaluation

Using the mixed-methods approach, this evaluates the effectiveness of the planned approach.

Planning

Creating a specific approach that is designed to address the specified challenge.

Acting

Implementing the plan.

Figure 1.1. Six phases of the MMAR approach (Ivankova, 2015, p. 61)

concerns both the organization and its shareholders (Ivankova, 2015). This information should come from a variety of sources, including institutional data, conversations with shareholders, organizational documents, and academic literature.

Institutional Data

Due to recent adjustments within the Seminary curriculum, following the

creation of the CFM program, minimal data exists regarding the effectiveness of

Seminary in supporting consistent at-home gospel learning. Before CFM, S&I

maintained a scripture reading requirement before a student could receive credit.

However, this was tracked annually and focused on whether or not a Seminary

student had read the assigned book in its entirety during the school year (S&I

Administrators' Council, 2020a). This strategy was not aligned with what they studied

in their Sunday Church classes and often differed from Gospel learning in the home

(Nelson, 2019).

   With the initial shift to supporting CFM, an adjustment to the reading

requirements shifted accountability from an annual cycle to a report that seniors make

prior to graduation (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020a). Seminary leaders hoped that

this would encourage home-centered gospel learning (HCGL), notwithstanding the

difficulties created by utilizing a school-calendar in Seminary and an annual calendar

with CFM. According to the Administrator for S&I worldwide,

> Students sometimes will have read and studied relevant scriptures at home and
> will bring those family or personal study experiences to seminary. Sometimes
> they will have studied these truths in seminary and what they learn will then go
> into their home study and bless their families. (Webb, 2019, n.p.)

Although great in theory, the application of this strategy became difficult, especially if

families were not actively involved in implementing CFM in their homes. Students

could postpone their scripture reading several years and, due to their lack of foresight

and diligence, potentially creating a situation too overwhelming to correct by the end

of their senior year.

   Beginning in 2021, the reading requirement shifted to focus on daily reading in

the book being studied simultaneously in CFM and Seminary (S&I Administrators'

Council, 2020b). Previous seminary reports tracked *if* students finished their readings,

not *when* they read them. When this change was implemented, Seminaries gave

currently enrolled Seminary students credit for scripture reading during previous

years, so they did not have to focus simultaneously on multiple reading requirements

if they had already fallen behind.

Due to these recent adjustments, there is little helpful institutional data for this

study. Prior reading reports did not track how often students studied the scriptures.

Additionally, the last few years of reading reports have been annulled because all

Seminary students currently enrolled in Seminary received credit for scripture reading

from all previous semesters.

Informal Conversations with Seminary Personnel

Conversations with my principal and faculty members revealed that during the

2019–20 school year, little was done within my Seminary building to encourage the

home-centered implementation of CFM, aside from verbal encouragement. Teachers

and Seminary leaders also expressed interest in finding ways to support this program.

However, it appeared that they were unsure about how to encourage their students in

an effective and engaging way.

Additional attempts to emphasize daily scripture study occurred during the

2020–21 school year. Before the Seminary graduation reading requirements were

adjusted to focus students more on developing a habit of daily scripture study, several

Seminary teachers implemented a challenge in Fall of 2020 that rewarded students for

focusing on a pattern of daily scripture study. To jumpstart this initiative, a building-wide scripture study challenge was issued. Nicknamed "PJS," this challenge invited Seminary students to pray, write in their journal, and study their scriptures for 30-consecutive days. If they missed a day doing any of these three elements, they were invited to start over. Once successful, they received a Seminary t-shirt.

Some teachers have also periodically taught lessons that supported Gospel learning in the home. For example, one teacher who anticipated an upcoming lesson, sent an electronic mail message to parents asking them to discuss with their adolescent children an ancestor who had demonstrated faith. The students were then invited to share these stories about their ancestors with their classmates. The teacher was impressed with how many students shared stories after having a conversation about ancestors with their parents or guardians.

Consistent with the focus created by the Seminary graduation requirements, these approaches largely focused on facilitating individual scripture study, with possible collateral benefits toward individual and family centered gospel learning, such as CFM. However, these conversations and casual observations have largely illustrated a focus on daily scripture study, rather than seeing them within the broader context of HCGL. Additionally, pedagogical methods have continued in a very similar fashion to how students were taught before the Seminary alignment with CFM. This suggests that the structural adjustments within Seminary have largely been implemented without remembering the home-centered, Seminary-supported context and without complementary adjustments in teaching approaches.

Organizational Documents

When Church and Seminary leaders decided to adjust the Seminary curriculum, they initially shared that Seminaries would roughly parallel CFM (Webb, 2019). In November of 2020, Seminary leaders announced that pacing would be further adjusted within the seminary classroom, since Seminaries would now also follow the 12-month calendar. This meant that scriptural passages studied at home while school was not in session would not be studied in the Seminary classroom (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020b).

Although there have been substantial adjustments made to curriculum and pacing within the Seminary classroom, little updated alterations to teacher manuals have been released. Although it was initially shared that teacher manuals would be updated in January 2022, this has since been delayed until January 2023 (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020b; Webb, 2019). The delay is due to significant curricular adjustments, since lessons must now fit a 12-month calendar, which requires an extensive translation process.

During the interim, Seminary teachers were provided a small teacher manual for Doctrinal Mastery, which was to serve as an insert within current curriculum manuals (Seminary and Institutes Curriculum Department, 2021). Doctrinal Mastery is a set of 25 scriptures from each of the 4 books of scripture that should be emphasized during the year that book was studied. Emphasis is placed on understanding and applying doctrines taught through real-life scenarios. Within these lessons, teachers are to help students learn the doctrine, as taught within the scripture passage. Then, students have an

opportunity to use that passage in a real-world situation. This situation may be either the scenario shared within the lesson outline or one that the teacher selects. Teachers may choose to emphasize a situation that they have noticed that their students face. Aside from this small insert, Seminary leadership has said that additional material will be forthcoming in 2023 (S&I Administrators' Council, 2020b).

Reviewed Literature

Quality teaching is vital for successful student learning outcomes (Hilton & Hilton, 2017). The teacher, as the key practitioner, is necessary for long-term real change to occur since they are the "most centrally engaged in education" and an "engine and a driver of improvement in educational practice" (Gregson, 2020, p. 2). Any real change in learning must involve the teachers, but it also cannot stop there. It must extend beyond the classroom into lives and homes. Otherwise the learning and development for that individual is only embryonic (Kaya, 2020).

School-community action plans. Discussions about how to extend learning from beyond the classroom have consistently filled academic journals and conference programs. School-community action plans and flipped-classroom learning have headlined the approaches adopted by many schools and teachers. School-community action plans involve the community beyond the schoolhouse to provide additional support for parents and guardians, enabling them to more capably support and raise the children under their care (Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Sanders & Sheldon, 2009). Successful implementation of this approach is described well by Epstein (2008). This approach strives to recognize and support any unintentionally marginalized individuals from the

traditional school community, such as students and families with a language, race, or ethnicity different from the prevailing majority (Becerra, 2012; Lopez et al., 2001), students with learning challenges (Billingsley et al., 2017), and fathers (Sanders & Sheldon, 2009).

Flipped classrooms. Teachers have experimented with a variety of methods to enhance learning within the classroom. Two of the more common alternate approaches are a flipped classroom and a problem-based learning approach. Flipped-classroom learning involves the acquisition of declarative knowledge prior to attending class, typically through prerecorded lectures. Class time is then focused on further developing student understanding of important concepts through projects and activities, as guided by the teacher (Diningrat et al., 2020; Lencastre et al., 2020). Support for this type of learning approach has gained momentum as proponents have identified a variety of beneficial academic and non-academic results for students and teachers (Altemueller & Lindquist, 2017; Al-Zahrani, 2015; Elmaadaway, 2018; Langdon & Sturges, 2018; Zainuddin et al., 2019). However, it also appears that this specific approach may not be ideal for every learning situation (Berrett, 2012; Strayer, 2012).

Problem-based learning. Problem-based learning focuses on helping children and youth learn experientially, often through real-world experiences or scenarios. This approach has been common in both the medical (Kwan, 2019) and language-acquisition communities (Farahani et al., 2019). Within the language learning community, research studies have suggested that heterogenous groups, where group members have different levels of language proficiency, and homogenous groups, where group members have

the same level of language proficiency, demonstrate similar learning gains (Farahani et al., 2019). Following its adoption, problem-based learning theorists differed in whether educators should focus more on knowledge acquisition or the process of problem-solving (Servant-Miklos, 2019). However, as the process has been applied, teachers have commonly noticed that experiential learning has enhanced students' ability to acquire knowledge, in addition to enhanced social skills and improved student attitudes (Voukelatou, 2019).

Although both the school-community action plan and flipped classroom learning contexts are helpful, neither one seamlessly describes the situation found within the Seminary classroom. Certainly, there is a need to help support students learning, especially in homes where CFM is under implemented. This can be done more powerfully through partnering with community members, such as bishops and stake presidents, than if championed solely by Seminary teachers. However, community-action plans often have a larger scope than the implementation of a single home-study program (Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

The flipped classroom has demonstrated many impressive gains, with a focus on content mastery at home and higher-level thinking about those subjects in the classroom. The CFM program seeks to cultivate content mastery and higher-level thinking through home study experiences, Sunday Church meetings, and Seminary classes. Each of these manuals are written with questions, quotes, and scenarios that help to foster this thinking (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020b, 2020d, 2020c, 2020a). Consequently, learning during the week does not culminate in

the Seminary or Church classroom—especially since the Church classroom only

discusses what individuals and families studied in CFM twice a month and Seminary only

operates for nine-months each year (Cook, 2018; S&I Administrators' Council, 2020b).

Each learning experience is more complementary of the other, so what is learned at

home might expand Seminary learning and what is learned in the Seminary classroom

might further enhance learning at home (Webb, 2019). If there is a direction that this

learning should extend, it appears that Seminary should be supporting the learning that

culminates in the home (R. M. Nelson, 2019; Webb, 2019).

In the Seminary classroom, there is some formal integration of problem-based

learning. Within each of the 25 Doctrinal Mastery lessons, scenarios and situations are

included where students can apply the things that they have learned into a relevant,

real-life situation. Sometimes the curriculum writers encourage students to create their

own scenario, either from their own life or from someone else's. Other lessons have

suggested scenarios written in. Although teachers are encouraged to utilize a scenario

to encourage deeper learning, they have the flexibility to either adapt or completely

replace the scenario with another that they feel is more important or relevant for their

students.

Seminary classroom. Several studies have explored ways that pedagogical

approaches can be enhanced within religious classrooms, such as effective dialogic

learning and role-playing games (Eke et al., 2005; Howard, 2018; Vrikki et al., 2019).

Other studies have examined the role of parental involvement in academic, social, and

emotional development (Sax & Gialamas, 2017). As a subset of The Church of Jesus

Christ of Latter-day Saints, the department of S&I is actively supporting the direction of Church leaders. Each local Seminary similarly operates under the guidance of a local Church board of education. Therefore, the Seminary functions to assist local Church leaders with the goals outlined by worldwide Church leaders, local Church leaders, and the leaders of S&I.

Seminary teachers, parents, and Come, Follow Me. A vital connector between CFM and the Seminary classroom is the involvement and connection of parents. Researchers have explored many aspects of this relationship, especially within the context of secondary schools. Studies have consistently shown that an authoritative style, one that is "responsive, warm, and firm but democratic" (Kreider et al., 2007, p. 2) is most likely to encourage high academic achievement from adolescents (Deslandes et al., 1999; Deslandes & Barma, 2016; Spera, 2005). It also appears that parental communication of high aspirations and expectations for their children had a more significant effect on academic achievement and student self-efficacy than other modes of parental support (Cross et al., 2019; Fan & Chen, 2001; Kreider et al., 2007; Shute et al., 2011). One study indicated that home-based involvement can harm student achievement, if it interferes with student autonomy and creates excessive parent pressure (Hill & Tyson, 2009).

Parents and educators experience synergy when they unify and combine their efforts to help adolescents (Christensen, 2004). Parental intervention appears to be enhanced by effective communication between teachers and parents. To be effective, this communication should help increase trust between both the teacher and the

parent. Often teachers reach out to students only when there is a behavior or academic challenge. Parents have indicated that trust and communication are enhanced when teachers notify parents of improvement that they see within their youth (Deslandes & Barma, 2016). It appears that this pattern of parental involvement increases when parents perceive that a school is focusing on encouraging parental involvement (Dauber & Epstein, 1989). Despite the efforts of dedicated teachers, parent-teacher relationships are also affected by the parent-adolescent relationship (Deslandes & Barma, 2016).

Adolescent behaviors can help to encourage or minimize support from parental figures. As adolescents grow older and more autonomous, parents typically begin to intervene less (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005; Spera, 2005). However, high parental involvement occurred more frequently when students invited that assistance and support from their parents (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005).

Several parental factors have a significant impact on the level of parental engagement, especially in academic endeavors. Parents' level of education influences how involved they were in their children's learning, largely because of their familiarity with and value for the academic experience (Deslandes et al., 1999). The family structure may has a significant impact on parental involvement, with single-parents and step-parents less involved in homework than traditional parents (Astone & McLanahan, 1991) and parents with fewer children spending more time helping children with homework (Deslandes & Bertrand, 2005). Parents may also want to motivate their adolescent boys and girls differently, depending on their gender and relationship with that child (Kreider et al., 2007).

Deeper Learning. Another example of a learner-centered approach is deeper learning, which has been defined as both a set of student competencies and a process of learning that helps to develop these competencies. The competencies are grouped into one of three categories: cognitive, interpersonal, or intrapersonal. *Cognitive abilities* include content mastery, problem-solving, and creative thinking skillsets. *Interpersonal competencies* revolve around an individual's ability to communicate and collaborate. *Intrapersonal competencies* involve an individual's self-awareness, motivation, perseverance, and self-management. In comparison to schools that delivered instruction via traditional pedagogical approaches, schools that utilized the deeper learning approach found gains in several of subsets of these competencies (Zeiser et al., 2014).

Design Thinking. Popularized in part by IDEO, design thinking, has merged out of the engineering world and into the classroom. This approach, which can be utilized by both educators and students (McGlashan, 2018; Phusavat et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2018), focuses on identifying an authentic challenge or problem and then undergoing an intensive process to understand all aspects of that challenge and iteratively finding solutions in a collaborative way (IDEO, 2013). Some educators become interested in the process but remain unsure how to effectively utlize this strategy within their classrooms (Hennessey & Mueller, 2020). After its initial offering for educators, IDEO developed a second toolkit, designed to help educators engage in the design thinking process within the classroom (IDEO, 2020). Lord (2019) also helped to bridge the gap by introducing a term *flexible learning*, which bridges the gap between design-thinking processes and skill-development strategies within secondary education through applying information

learned in class to real-world problems. Additionally, a team of researchers developed a Design-led Education Innovation Matrix that enables teachers and learners to experience design thinking at different levels, while focusing more narrowly on the development of specific abilities and perspectives (Wright & Wrigley, 2019).

Findings from Diagnostic Phase

The diagnostic phase revealed an increasing focus within S&I on a home-centered, Seminary-supported approach. This focus yielded several key developments, including the adjustment of the Seminary teaching schedule and the reading requirement. However, these adjustments have largely been made without much explanation about how to make those changes effectively. Additionally, the emphasis on these strategies has largely not led to similar adjustments in teacher instruction.

Research Problem Statement

Leadership involves not only sharing a vision for where individuals and organizations should arrive but also helping to create plans and processes that enable their constituents to arrive there effectively and efficiently (Hughes et al., 1996; Kouzes & Posner, 2006). After conducting an extensive review of instructional and learning strategies, I determined that teachers, students, and families would benefit from a closer connection between the teaching that occurs within the Seminary classroom and HCGL, particularly within the CFM program. To support curricular adjustments that have occurred within the Church and the Seminary program, teachers may need to adjust their teaching and other classroom approaches to reinforce these practices.

The purpose of this MMAR study is to improve the learning and teaching

methods within release-time Seminary classrooms to encourage more students to engage regularly in both individual and family scripture study, in alignment with the CFM program for youth and families within the Eagle Mountain, Utah area.

<p style="text-align:center">General Study Plan</p>

This MMAR study involves the teachers located at the aforementioned Seminary. Although I had wanted to engage other shareholder groups in my study, the Church determined that at this time only Seminary teachers and administrators could be study participants, without significantly delaying the timelines for my study while trying to receive the needed clearance from the Church's Research Division.

Study Purpose

This study examines how effectively Seminary teachers perceive that they are reinforcing a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach and how collaborative efforts can aid teachers in developing this approach. In seeking to understand this, this action-research project measures how well teachers help to encourage students to follow different learning strategies (i.e., teaching methods, discussion questions, and other activities intended for use both at-home and in the classroom), and other parent or student interactions, particularly in relation to encouraging the at-home implementation of the CFM program. It also focuses on how the development of collaborative groups among teachers help aid teachers in the development of this approach.

Overall Study Design

This research study utilizes a mixed-methods design. Three qualitative methods

are used: open-ended questions in a pre- and post-survey, observations, and a focus

group interview. The open-ended survey questions invite participants to self-reflect on

their attitudes toward and application of a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel

learning approach. Many of the short-answer questions asked are identical in both the

pre- and post-survey. Observations largely rely on my observations of what teacher

practices are discussed, tested, and adopted by individuals. These observations occur

within smaller communities of practice discussions, which include several faculty

members each, and at monthly inservice meetings. Although not formally recorded,

teachers are encouraged to visit often with each other about what they see that helps

or harms the intended outcome of HCGL. Teachers can then iteratively apply

approaches that support students and their families. After almost three months of

iterative testing, a final focus group with all study participants where they will have an

opportunity to reflect on what was learned throughout the study. The questions invite

reflection on what helped teachers to develop their current approaches, what visible

outcomes they now notice with students and parents, what is still needed to fully

accomplish this objective, and what they have learned from the collaborative, design

thinking approach.

The quantitative assessment includes a survey, administered at both the

beginning and the end of the study. The pre-survey includes ten questions using a Likert-

scale and four free-response questions. The Likert-scale questions provide an

opportunity for each participant to self-assess their thoughts about the home-centered,

Seminary-supported approach, how committed they are to that approach, to what

degree they feel successful in implementing this approach, and how often they collaborate with others. The post-survey has the same questions as the pre-survey with an additional three Likert-scale questions and three slightly adjusted free-response questions, which invite their evaluation of inservice meetings and community of practice discussions.

Ethical Considerations

To protect the confidentiality of those involved in the study, pseudonyms are used and identifying information is removed from data gathered. Each teacher has the freedom to determine their level of her or his participation in this study.

Researcher Bias

As a Seminary teacher that believes in the virtue of a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach, I am biased toward encouraging teachers to integrate the changes recommended by the Church into their instructional practices. Many, if not all, of members of our faculty appear to share a similar bias. In my role as a faculty member and assistant principal, I have developed closer and more trusting friendships with some teachers than with others. Recognizing these friendships may foster potential biases, I recently completed a graduate course about communities of practice that included strategies used to conduct classroom observations and professional conversations with peers. While enrolled in that course, I also had opportunities to practice those strategies with teachers at my school. Thus, I endeavor to focus on fair and equal involvement in classroom observations I conduct. I utilize focus groups, rather than interviews with individual teachers, while conducting this study. My goal is to avoid any potential

skewing of data that could result from undue reliance on the experiences of a particular teacher.

Church Limitations

The Church limited the scope of this research to include only teachers and administrators at my school. I originally wanted to include parents as study participants; however, that would have required an extensive and timely process to gain the required permissions from the Church's Research Division, a subset of the Correlation Department.

Summary

The S&I Department within the Church has changed significantly in recent years as Seminary leaders considered ways to better implement a home-centered, Seminary-supported approach to gospel learning. Over recent years, adjustments were made to both the curricular approach and graduation requirements to support learning within the home. In alignment with these adjustments, additional changes are forthcoming (i.e., curriculum, resources). As the Church determines ways to support at-home gospel learning, I anticipate that S&I leaders will also develop additional formal training. The vision has been established and clearly articulated, but the process to achieve that vision is still developing. It feels like an oft-quoted phrase in business and education circles: Seminary leaders are "building the plane as they fly" (Alvarado, 2017).

CHAPTER 2

RECONNAISSANCE PHASE

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the reconnaissance portion of MMAR study (Ivankova, 2015). This includes an explanation of what exploratory investigations were conducted, what was learned from conversations with involved Seminary personnel, and what was gleaned from a relevant literature review.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to help release-time Seminary teachers from the Church effectively implement CFM, a home-centered, Church- and Seminary-supported learning approach for high school students and their parents. Since Seminary teachers most commonly influence their students within a classroom setting, the study focuses primarily on helping teachers implement diverse learner-centered approaches in their teaching. To assure the Church's goals for the new program are achieved, teachers may independently explore student or parent reactions to the CFM program. These adjustments to teachers' instructional practices within their classrooms are discussed and reinforced through the creation of three communities of practice (CoP) (Millar et al., 2019; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Wenger & Snyder, 2001; Windschitl, Thompson, Braaten, & Stroupe, 2019). The intent of implementing three CoPs is to help teachers develop, assess, and maintain skills and practices related to their responsibility to help support HCGL. Participation in the teachers' CoP is voluntary.

Reconnaissance Phase

Within the MMAR framework, the reconnaissance phase involves "collecting,

analyzing, and interpreting data about a problem" previously diagnosed (Ivankova,

2015, p. 44). This process does much to inform the specific intervention that a

researcher might implement to ensure that it is not only valued by shareholders but also

likely to accomplish the intended objective. This chapter explains the exploratory

process and findings through informal conversations with teachers and leaders within

the S&I system in Eagle Mountain, UT. The issues explored were the current state of the

home-centered, Seminary-supported program and the challenges related to its

successful implementation.

Methods and Procedures

The reconnaissance phase is the first of two "study phases" (Ivankova, 2015, p.

44) used in action research. It helps to *assess* the problem revealed during the diagnosis

phase, *identify* where changes are needed, and *inform* development of a specific plan of

action. Although a mixed-methods design is vital to triangulate a final implementation

(Johnson et al., 2007), I decided use a more qualitative approach in my reconnaissance

phase since "qualitative studies are more exploratory in nature. They aim at hypothesis

generating rather than hypothesis testing" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 35). Although I

was focusing on continuing adjustments made by the Church within the Seminary

program, the diagnosis phase revealed that the program was underdeveloped.

However, I did not perceive that I fully understood the nature of the problem.

Research Questions

To provide greater understanding regarding the challenges that teachers are

facing with implementing a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning

approach, I had conversations with six individuals. These individuals included a regional

director, who is responsible for Seminary programs at several different high schools, the

principal at the Eagle Mountain Seminary, and four teachers at this Seminary with a

wide range of teaching experience. Each of these individuals were asked questions that

gathered their thoughts, opinions, and perspectives about fully implementing a home-

centered, Seminary-supported approach. The conversations explored topics like how

important they felt this was for their students, how they could tell if their students were

following the approach, what challenges they saw to fully integrating the program either

at home or in the classroom, and what they felt thought teachers and students needed

for the program to be successful. These conversations often simultaneously helped me

to understand the nature of the problem and stimulated a desire for those I visited with

to participate in future studies, now that they had begun to think more about the

challenges and how to address them.

Informants and Their Assessments

The six teachers with whom I talked informally had a wide range of experience,

both within and outside the Seminary system. The regional director's current

assignment is to oversee Seminaries at five high schools and their feeder junior high

schools. Previously, he served as a principal at two Seminaries and worked at the

worldwide headquarters for S&I. During that assignment, he was involved in the training

division where he helped to develop a standardized new-teacher training program, along with training for those assigned to mentor new teachers.

The principal was completing his first year of this new assignment. Within the Church's Seminary system, teaching is emphasized; thus, principals and assistant principals maintain a teaching load in addition to completing their administrative duties. The number of classes they teach depends on the number of faculty members they supervise. Although common, it is not required for a principal to have previously served as an assistant principal. Their prior experience is not emphasized as much as their current skillset and willingness to fulfill new job responsibilities. The principal taught for over ten years before receiving his first administrative responsibility. He nonetheless remains a passionate teacher.

Among the four teachers that I visited with, two have taught for two years or less—one for the first time throughout a full academic year. The other two teachers are much more experienced in the Seminary classroom, having taught Seminary for more than 15 years each in many different locations throughout Utah. The newest Seminary teacher, however, previously taught in an elementary school classroom for many years before making a career change to secondary school. I thought that the diversity in their experiences might aid in this exploratory process.

Information was gathered during six face-to-face conversations that took place privately during a week. I visited with the regional director in the Seminary building and with the principal and teachers at my school. The comments of each individual yielded some significant similarities and differences.

Data Analysis and Integration

The six individuals consistently shared that they felt parent engagement was vital for student learning. Several informants shared that they were concerned many students were not experiencing the home-centered approach within the *CFM* program. They think that Seminary classes are used too often to replace—rather than supplement—what is being learned at home. One individual asserted that when the shared responsibility functions well, both the home learning and the Seminary class should provide additional learning and insights. The informant thought that this would not only help to enhance learning now but develop greater excitement within younger siblings about having a future opportunity to participate in Seminary. The concerns that teachers expressed were not whether this emphasis on HCGL was important but rather if the program was being implemented appropriately in students' homes.

Although all those with whom I visited voiced support for a collaboratively supported Gospel learning approach, many shared that they have not been focusing on how to develop this collaboration within their classrooms. Three of the four teachers thanked me for initiating the conversation because it heightened their awareness. They now realized that the expected home-school collaboration had inadvertently been under-emphasized in their classroom instructional approaches. They appeared to leave our conversation even more committed to implementing this emphasis within their classroom.

One requirement for Seminary credit is for high-school students to read the texts being studied during that semester on at least 75% of the days during that semester,

including weekends. To assess that requirement, many Seminary teachers in my building ask students to update their reading report each day in class. This most often occurs through a mobile application developed by S&I that provides positive reinforcement for the students through prizes and awards within the app, which is also communicated to their teacher. Since most of this reading occurs outside of class, if students are reading their scriptures regularly, Seminary teachers often assume that personal or family scripture study is occurring in the students' home.

The Seminary teachers and leaders with whom I visited also highlighted the importance of student comments to indicate how actively they are participating in a HCGL experience. They shared that these comments may come from specific teacher-directed questions, such as "What are you learning from your parents?" or "What are you learning about [a specific topic or section of scripture] from your *CFM* discussions at home?" One individual specifically shared that she had found success in asking these types of questions at the beginning of a class period. The students' answers helped them to segue into what they would study that day in class. A few teachers also noted that unsolicited comments during class discussions often indicated the level of gospel study within the home. For example, a student may share something that a parent or sibling discussed while studying a particular doctrine or principle discussed in the scriptures. This would indicate that family scripture study is occurring in a memorable way, at least occasionally.

All individuals with whom I talked highlighted the responsibility of parents and families to engage in the *CFM* learning approach, while noting the challenges that

expectation creates. Some parents, although aware of the approach, are uncommitted to prioritizing and implementing it. One teacher noted that it is often unusual for students to try and influence their family's scripture study habits when their parents are uncommitted to doing it. However, he also optimistically noted that perhaps classroom efforts can help a student to commit to embracing this strategy within their own family one day with their spouse and children.

With the learning approach centered on parent and student engagement in their homes, it can be challenging for Seminary teachers to know how to support the program. The conversations highlighted the importance of teachers regularly inquiring about what their students are experiencing within their home-centered learning. A teacher shared that a challenge he perceives is helping students to be motivated to read their scriptures daily without feeling it is a checklist. He wants to replace external motivation factors with internal ones. Additionally, an administrator recognized that teachers may struggle with believing that their efforts lead to meaningful parental participation in CFM. The region director expressed his major concern: If teachers do not believe that CFM makes a difference within the lives of teenagers, then their commitment to assist their students, and those students' parents, with implementing a HCGL approach naturally wanes.

Several of those with whom I visited shared that teachers need to be trained on how to implement this home-centered approach. The concept of home-centered and Seminary-supported gospel learning has been discussed by high-level Seminary and Institute leaders. However, these six people perceived that training on how to

implement that approach has been minimal, at best. Another concern expressed was that teachers do not know how to determine whether—or if—this approach is being implemented by students and families. Several individuals, including one who is a stake president, asserted that ecclesiastical leaders in wards and stakes should provide training for individuals and families.

The six informants suggested a few additional practices for Seminary teachers to implement. This included skipping material to stay on-pace with what individuals and families are encouraged to study within *CFM*. One individual suggested that teachers could proactively reach out to parents to discover what could be done in a Seminary class to help them or their Seminary-age youth complete the program with the required four years.

These conversations helped to highlight a paradox: Seminary teachers commonly see critical value in a home-centered, Seminary-supported approach but often forget about this reality when teaching in their classrooms. It seems that some Seminary teachers may feel unprepared to effectively reinforce a home-centered learning approach.

Supporting Literature

Leaders can help to facilitate learning within professional situations in a variety of ways. These commonly include an approach utilizing professional development, professional learning communities or communities of practice. Below is a synthesis of key literature on these topics and their viability within a Seminary context.

Professional Development

Professional development (PD) is a common and widespread method utilized by schools and districts to assure both teachers and administrators remain informed about best practices (Elmore, 2002; Ibay & Pa-alisbo, 2020; Pharis et al., 2019; Wei et al., 2010). Educational leaders most commonly use this to help "teachers acquire the knowledge and skills required to improve student learning" (Lin & Kim, 2013, p. 23), although it may also be used to change classroom practices or teacher attitudes and beliefs (Guskey, 2002).

Although widely implemented, the success of PD programs is disputed, even occasionally challenging previously held norms about how PD should be designed and delivered (Azukas, 2019; Bonghanoy, Sagpang, Alejan Jr., & Rellon, 2019; Elmore, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Hill, Beisiegel, & Jacob, 2013; Klein & Riordan, 2009). These disputes question the effectiveness of PD processes (Hill et al., 2013), the nuances among different strategies (Garet et al., 2001), and the utilization of suggested strategies within teachers' classrooms (Klein & Riordan, 2009). Notwithstanding the divided results of PD studies, Guskey (2000) shared that "notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development" (p. 4). Although certainly not a panacea, most effective large-scale educational improvement efforts utilize PD.

Core elements of successful PD activities include a "focus on content knowledge, opportunities for active learning, and coherence with other learning activities" (Garet et al., 2001, p. 916). To assure these principles become integrated into teachers' classroom

practices, it is also vital that PD activities are long-term in nature (Klein & Riordan, 2009) and involve regular feedback according to a well-established standard (Guskey, 2002). Recently, there have also been explorations regarding how personalized learning, a differentiated classroom instruction method that is gaining popularity, can be successfully integrated into PD experiences (Azukas, 2019).

Within Seminaries, PD experiences are common. Full-time Seminary teachers participate in a weekly inservice, typically with their faculty peers. The Church also sponsors an annual global training, in addition to a few additional cluster or regional trainings, headlined by a week-long summer inservice led by a region or area director. These PD trainings commonly focus on either helping teachers to improve student learning, commonly through more effective teaching, or enhancing recruitment efforts to involve more youth in Seminary. Currently, much of the PD material for inservice meetings is sent to weekly inservice leaders from the Seminary's worldwide headquarters. Inservice leaders have flexibility to adapt instruction to meet local needs, but they are instructed to emphasize the specified subject.

Professional Learning Community

Within education, the concept of a professional learning community (PLC) was defined and popularized by Dufour and Eaker (1998). The underlying assumption of these PLCs is that "peer collaboration has the potential of transforming teaching practices in ways that will bring about higher rates of student achievement" (Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012, p. 204). PLCs are formed under the direction of school leaders who see value in these organizations but commonly have different levels of

understanding about how to successfully form and support them (Cranston, 2009). As a result, PLCs commonly focus on managed and measurable professionalism rather than a "creative, grassroots" approach (Nelson, Slavit, Perkins, & Hathorn, 2008, p. 166).

Successful development of PLCs is challenging and requires planning and commitment from teachers, staff members, and school administration (Dahl, 2020; Dufour, 2004; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). Successful implementation of a PLC requires three things: (a) development of a clear vision for the PLC's purpose, (b) consistent communication among members between meetings, and (c) willingness of members to allocate time and energy to the goals of the PLC (Fred, Meeuwen, Ellen, & Marjan, 2020; Maloney & Konza, 2011; Nelson et al., 2008; Servage, 2009), Further, it takes time and effort to create high-preforming PLCs because group members must progress through several developmental phases and become willing to engage in robust debate regarding the issues (Owen, 2014). If implemented effectively, PLCs can help schools to excel (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

Some PLC proponents advocate that they should be considered a potential replacement for traditional PD. In a study of rural Kentucky schools, a team of researchers evaluated initial perceptions of a new teacher improvement system and how those perceptions changed throughout the year while that system was being implemented. Among other things, their findings suggested that a community-minded approach to PD within schools was effective (Pharis, Wu, Sullivan, & Moore, 2019).

Minimal development of PLCs has occurred within S&I where active participation in PLCs is not widespread, and, when organized, each PLC focuses on

finding solutions to a specific concern. Within S&I, PLCs have explored the transition of

high-school students in Seminary to a college-age Institute program or ways to innovate

learning with the classroom. Within these two PLCs, only 7 people within a region of

more than 80 Seminary teachers are invited to participate.

Communities of Practice

CoPs are "groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and

passion for a joint enterprise" (Wenger & Snyder, 2000, p. 139). Rather than focusing on

relationships deriving from similar work assignments or project teams, individuals

voluntarily coalesce around a shared interest and passion. When these communities are

thriving, they can increase motivation and enhance the sharing of learning (Goldberg,

2019; Romero, 2020), provide sustained support leading toward real-change rather than

a single intervention (Azukas, 2019; Millar et al., 2019), and develop increased teacher

self-efficacy (Kelley, Knowles, Holland, & Han, 2020).

These organizations are defined by three key dimensions: joint enterprise,

mutual engagement, and shared repertoire (Davidson & Hughes, 2018; Wenger, 1998).

Joint enterprise explores what members of the CoP hope to achieve. The CoPs focus may

be continuously refined as community members determine where they want to focus

their energy and efforts. *Mutual engagement* involves how the CoP functions and the

relationships that connect its members to each other. *Shared repertoire* includes the

capability and communal resources that the CoP has produced over time. Wenger and

Snyder (2000) insightfully note, "As communities of practice generate knowledge, they

renew themselves. They give you both the golden eggs and the goose that lays them"

(p. 143).

Although CoPs consistently implode when led by organizational leaders, schools

and businesses can create a fertile climate that enhances the likelihood of their success

(Wenger, 1998; Wenger & Snyder, 2000). One study explored the effect of engaging

new science teachers in a CoP. The researchers noted that multiple factors, including

the structure of their research group and their mentoring experience, influenced how

these teachers felt participating in the CoP (Davidson & Hughes, 2018). Wenger and

Synder (2000) assert, "The best way for an executive to assess the value of a community

of practice is by listening to members' stories, which can clarify the complex

relationships among activities, knowledge, and performance" (p. 145).

To succeed, CoP members must often surpass challenges. The community may

need to be careful that hierarchical organization does not, even inadvertently, develop a

tacit pattern of minimizing of relevant voices (Dahl, 2020). It may be challenging to help

community members build trusting relationships (Akinyemi, Rembe, & Nkonki, 2020),

particularly when members are dispersed across diverse geographic locations (Goldberg,

2019). Further, the process of improvement is iterative in nature. Variations in practices

are proposed, initially implemented, and then either adopted or more permanently

discarded. Ultimately, this commonly leads to positive change, even though the process

if often messy (Windschitl et al., 2019).

Recently, Seminary leaders took a small, yet important, step to create a more

supportive organizational culture for potential CoPs. Within each region, which

encompasses around 80 teachers, one teacher was selected to serve as a member of a larger committee to further develop teaching and learning within the Seminary classroom. The committee member in my region has also begun to create a CoP with other teachers to help encourage innovative and creative approaches in the classroom. Each member dictates their own engagement in the group, since participation is voluntary. Several Zoom meetings have been conducted, and a OneNote notebook was created to increase collaboration. In addition, a variety of conversations and electronic-mail exchanges from the CoP have encouraged and communicated different teaching ideas and approaches.

Findings from Reconnaissance Phase

Conversations with local Seminary teachers and leaders suggests there exists a common desire to further develop a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach. However, these teachers and leaders also commonly either feel confusion about how to facilitate this within the lives and homes of their students or forget to value this after receiving additional directives from Seminary and Institute leaders about other subjects. It appears that this framework has largely been lost amid the other day-to-day job requirements.

Educational leaders have developed several different methods for teacher training and development. Three of the most common methods include participating in PD, a PLC, or a CoP. Each strategy requires involvement by different administrators and leaders and is commonly used to accomplish different purposes. PD provides a top-down approach that facilitates widespread training intended for specified objectives

(i.e., enhance knowledge, competencies, and skills in a standardized manner). PLCs are directed by a central committee and facilitated by a designated leader who determines topics and facilitates discussions. A CoP is an organic, grassroots group whose members are united by a common interest or trait. Leadership within a CoP is a function, not a responsibility or right of one person. These communities vary in size, and individuals can determine their own level of participation.

The problem of practice for this MMAR project is well-defined, and the Seminary teachers feel a great desire to find a mediating influence. Several viable and proven methods for facilitating training and communication among these teachers are available through engagement in a CoP. In the next chapter, I explain what intervention was selected, the reasons for that selection, and the results following the implementation of the intervention.

CHAPTER 3

PLANNING AND ACTING PHASES

With what was learned through the reconnaissance phase, I am able to move

forward with what Ivankova (2015) calls the planning and acting phases. During these

phases, my specific intervention was carefully designed and implemented. During and

following the implementation, research is conducted, using both qualitative and

quantitative methods. The collected data is then synthesized to help render conclusions

that inform the success of this intervention and guide future decisions and additional

adjustments. The first part of this process is planning how to approach the intervention

and how to measure the effectiveness of those actions.

Planning Phase

As part of the "iterative stages" (Ivankova, 2015, p. 37) of action research, the

planning phase focuses on determining the specific approach for how to implement the

proposed action. As part of this process, the researcher considers how to evaluate the

effectiveness of the action. Since this is a mixed-methods action research study, this

plan involves using both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Four key

aspects of the planning phase include (a) what methods and processes will be used, (b)

what research questions will guide the study, (c) who will be the study participants, and

(d) how the data will be collected (Ivankova, 2015).

Methods and Procedures

Throughout the reconnaissance phase, it became clear that teachers were

largely committed to a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach.

However, they often expressed challenges they faced in focusing on that approach both within their classroom and their interactions with parents and students. When reminded of that focus during our conversation, several teachers began to get more excited about exploring possible actions that they could take within and outside the classroom to help expand their reach and influence, both in the lives of their students and the families of those students.

In exploring various methods to foster and encourage teacher learning about implementing a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach, several key principles came into play. First, it became apparent that helping everyone to understand the value of this home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach was vital. The teachers needed to see the value of this through the eyes of their students and parents and from the perspective of Church and Seminary leaders. This unity in purpose and direction would enable proposed applications to be complementary rather than conflicting to the teachers' high goals and objectives. Teachers could then explore different methodologies and approaches that may aid them, their students, and their students' families in reaching the desired destination more effectively.

Second, creativity and ideas needed to be encouraged among the teachers, enabling them to feel trusted and free to test alternate methods and ways of thinking. They needed to be encouraged and liberated to engage in iterative design thinking. I perceived this would not happen effectively if done during a meeting with the entire faculty but determined it would be effective within smaller cohorts of teachers. After these initial ideas were generated and shared with their smaller groups, additional ideas

emerged that could compliment and invite additional creativity without pushing all faculty members toward identical modes of application.

Acting Phase

This led to the development of an integrated approach utilizing PD, design thinking, and CoPs. To help bring a unified feeling towards home-centered learning, as discussed by both the Church and the S&I Department, I felt it would be beneficial to provide an initial inservice where the underpinnings of a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach were explored and discussed. At the end of this first inservice, near the beginning of October 2021, I taught faculty members design thinking principles. Using these principles, I invited each teacher to consider ideas that they would like to try within their classroom over the next two weeks to better support HCGL. To further facilitate this iterative development, the teachers would be formed into different CoPs, called faculty pods. Each CoP included four teachers to foster creative thinking and approaches. The teacher groupings were also roughly based on their office locations within the Seminary building.

Approximately two weeks after this initial inservice, in mid-October, each CoP gathered to discuss what they had done to enhance HCGL, within their classroom and in other interactions with parents and students, and how effective they thought those efforts were. Members of each CoP had an opportunity to discuss these observations with each other, enabling teachers to decide whether to continue with the methods that they had been using, adapt those methods and improve them, or adopt new methods that they believed would better develop this home-centered, Seminary-

supported learning experience. As before, teachers then had an opportunity to experiment with implementing these approaches over the next two weeks.

At the beginning of November 2021, another faculty inservice meeting was held. At the beginning of this inservice, each CoP was given an opportunity to share what they had observed and learned over the past month. Following this discussion, additional training occurred to expand their ability to empathetically help their end-user, the students, and their families.

To do this, I first shared a portion of "How to Design Breakthrough Inventions," a segment from "60 Minutes" that aired in January 2013 about IDEO, a product design firm in California ("The Deep Dive: One Company's Secret Weapon for Innovation," 1999). The purpose of this was to better understand and implement empathy. Empathy is a term that Steve Kelley, the founder of IDEO, teaches is the key to their success. Namely, being "empathetic to people … like, try to understand what they really value." This was intended to help shift faculty members' thinking from "What will best help to enhance my classroom experience?" to "What challenges or pain-points are my students and their families experiencing about HCGL and how can I help to support them by addressing those challenges?"

Second, I showed them a clip from Don Clarke, a leader in the Church. He was training Church employees on how to provide feedback and correction. He shared a story about when he was a professor and took business students to South America, where they would provide business consulting for struggling small businesses. They went into one place where there were open wires around the establishment and,

consequently, a high risk of electrocution. When a student suggested that they ask the

business to fix their wiring, Clarke said that would not make them any more money. He

did not want to start there because then the company would stop listening to them

because they didn't see an impact in what they valued. After Clarke and his students

told the business owners to do a few things to increase what they sold and decrease

costs, they willingly fixed the wires (Clarke, 2013). In previous pod discussions, I heard a

lot of ideas where teachers wanted to invite families and students to do a lot of

different things. With this clip, I wanted to help participants focus on what would help

families to see the biggest difference, rather than what came first to mind or what the

teacher wanted to see happen.

Since a key component of this study was the CoPs, I wanted to continue

encouraging the development of them. Thus, much of the inservice discussion occurred

within these groups, as guided by carefully considered questions. As pods identified and

discussed guiding principles, they were encouraged to write them down on

whiteboards. At the end of the inservice, each faculty member had an opportunity to

reflect on and set additional goals. I invited them to consider whether they should

continue with methods that they were already using, adapt and improve those

methods, or adopt new methods that they felt would better help them to support

gospel learning within the home.

Like what happened in October, faculty members visited two weeks later within

their CoPs to share what they have tried to do with students and their families, including

the effects of those attempts. Additional adjustments, as needed, could be made throughout the remainder of November.

At the beginning of December, an inservice like the one conducted at the beginning of November occurred. Each CoP had an opportunity to share what they had implemented over the last month and what results they had seen. In the previous inservice, this had taken had limited the training that followed because of how long it took. As a result, I timed each CoP for five minutes to help share their ideas more concisely. Afterwards, I briefly reviewed what we discussed in November's inservice because questions and comments in faculty pod meetings that month showed me that there was still a gap in understanding throughout much of the faculty. I then sought to help increase the urgency that participants felt to develop a home-centered, Seminary-supported approach in a collaborative way. To do this, I taught some of the historical context behind Official Declaration 2, a statement made in 1978 by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that allowed all males to receive the priesthood (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1978). I thought this would be appropriate approach since the faculty was preparing to teach this topic in their classes.

At the time of this revelation, Spencer W. Kimball was serving as President of the Church. His son, Edward Kimball, later wrote a detailed article providing insight into the process and decision from journals, diaries, administrative records, and letters (Kimball, 2008). When the decision was made, Spencer Kimball was very careful to not move forward until he sensed unanimous consent. Although he was serving as the President of the Church, the two leading administrative bodies of the Church, the First Presidency

and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, typically made decisions using that process. This required him to painstakingly discuss this issue for many years with his colleagues in the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve. He would often ask questions, invite their perspectives, and counsel with God in prayer. He presided over the decision, but the decision was made jointly. Using this as an example, I encouraged active discussions within pods as an important way to develop effective ways of supporting gospel learning in the home.

One particular quote from a letter that Spencer Kimball wrote to his son, Edward, in 1963 captured my attention, "Revelations will probably never come unless they are desired. I think few people receive revelations while lounging on the couch or while playing cards or while relaxing. I believe most revelations would come when a man is on his tip toes, reaching as high as he can for something which he knows he needs, and then there bursts upon him the answer to his problems" (Kimball, 2008, p. 46) We visited about what it means to desire something and how you can tell if you really desire to improve the home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach among your students and their families. At the end, I again invited teachers to set goals and focus on iterative improvement.

Due to some unanticipated complications in getting the study started and in consultation with my chair, Dr. Browne-Ferrigno and I determined to forgo the final CoP discussion since two individuals in the study would not be at the study site in January, the other faculty members would be teaching a new combination of students, and it would otherwise happen at about the same time that I would hold the final group

discussion. Consequently, we ended with a final focus-group discussion with eleven of the twelve study participants. They shared about what they learned regarding a home-centered, Seminary-supported approach and the role that the small group, collaborative discussions had on their development of that approach.

Research Questions

Throughout this study, I sought for information to help develop my understanding about how to better implement a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach and the role those collaborative efforts could play in that implementation. A few research questions helped me to recognize the most relevant information:

- What Seminary-teacher activities are most helpful in supporting students and their families with implementing an effective HCGL approach?

- How is this identification of best practices aided through design thinking and communities of practice?

- Do Seminary teachers feel that this adjustment enhances the classroom learning experience with their students? If so, in what ways?

Data collection throughout all phases of the study included a pre- and post-survey of study participants, observational notes from inservice lessons and CoP gatherings, and transcription notes from the last two inservices and the final focus group discussion with study participants.

Study Participants

Study participants included nine full-time Seminary teachers, two student teachers, and the Seminary principal at a release-time Seminary in Eagle Mountain, Utah. All study participants were invited to participate in an inservice meeting and CoP discussion each month. These meetings and discussions were intended to increase the participants' competency and self-awareness of activities that help them support gospel learning in the home. Later, they reflected on their experience during a final discussion with other faculty members.

These Seminary teachers possess a wide range of experience, including four teachers that have taught for three years or less and four teachers that have taught for 15 years or more. Additionally, study participants have a variety of experience teaching Gospel principles to children in their home. Some faculty members have grandchildren. Others have predominantly teenage and young adult children. The remaining have young children, no children, or are not married. I perceive the varying family structures of study participants provides opportunities for them to personally implement a home-centered approach, in different ways which may facilitate additional creativity.

Data Collection

Data collection involved both qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative data was gathered through observational notes written during both monthly inservice meetings and monthly CoP discussions. The inservice meetings are mandatory for faculty members, whether or not they choose to participate in the study. Since all present at the final two inservice meetings choose to be study participants, these

meetings were recorded and transcribed. The reflective discussion at the end of this iterative cycle was also recorded and transcribed to provide additional qualitative assessment. I received additional perspectives from participants responses to the free-response questions on the pre- and post-surveys. Quantitative data was obtained through a pre- and post-survey administered to all study participants before the first inservice began and before the final reflective discussion occurred (see Table 3.1). Two study participants did not attend the initial inservice and one did not attend the final focus group discussion. They each took the applicable survey at another time.

Quality Assurance and Ethical Considerations

Each of the observation forms were standardized, helping to guard against potential inconsistencies due an inconsistent evaluation method for tracking and recording observation notes. Participants could self-select much of their own level of participation, especially in CoP discussions. Additionally, each participant was encouraged, but not forced, to respond to both the pre- and post-survey. They could also skip questions that they preferred not to answer. Data was analyzed after names were replaced with pseudonyms. All potentially identifying information about study participants within the aggregated data was removed, to ensure the preservation of participants' anonymity. This study was also reviewed by University of Kentucky Office of Research Integrity, approved by the Research Division within the S&I Department, and complies with guidelines from the local Area and Region Director of S&I.

Table 3.1

Action Phase Data Collection Instruments and Timeline

Data Source	Data	Sample	Collection Period
Participant Pre-Survey	Evaluation of each teacher's current focus on and effectiveness with a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach	All study participants	Beginning of October 2021
CoP Discussion Observational Notes	Notes reflecting the ideas shared, dynamics and discussion within each CoP	Participants within each CoP	Mid-October, and mid-November 2021
Inservice Observational Notes	Transcription regarding the ideas that each CoP presented at the beginning of inservice	Participants within each CoP	Beginning of October and November 2021
Final Report Discussion Observational Notes	Recorded and transcribed conversation when the final report is shared and ensuing discussion of what was learned	All study participants	Mid-December 2021
Participant Post-Survey	Evaluation of current focus on and effectiveness with a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach. Reflections on design thinking process, CoP experience and current classroom learning experience	All study participants	December 2021

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Prior to the study, there was already a strong culture of collaboration within the faculty at Cedar Valley Seminary. On four days each week, the adjacent public high school places each of the students within homerooms, called "Jet Time," where they spent thirty minutes building connections and developing life skills, including resilience, honesty, and gratitude. Since there are no students in the Seminary during this time, two of these four days each week are used as optional faculty collaboration times. These informal discussions are well-attended and focus on upcoming lessons. Teachers are encouraged to come prepared to share ideas about how they are going to approach upcoming topics and scripture passages in ways that facilitate learning and application within the lives of their students.

However, teachers on the faculty are not accustomed to smaller group discussions, aside from the occasional informal "water cooler" discussion. Therefore, arranging the faculty into three different CoPs, or "pods," created a sense of familiarity intermixed with newness. To help bridge the gap and facilitate more rapid group cohesion, these pods were organized according to the approximate geographic location of each teacher's office throughout the building.

Purpose of This Study

At the Seminary where this study was conducted, faculty members are accustomed to developing ideas and making decisions as a full faculty. This creates an atmosphere of potential groupthink, where individuals would begin to strive for

unanimity at the expense of other reasonable alternatives (Janis, 1972). On this faculty, over half of them have been together since the Seminary and adjacent public high school first opened, with several of those having taught together for several previous years at other locations. Since many faculty members have worked together for multiple years, several began to fulfill a consistent role, especially when they gather to discuss concepts and ideas. This created a potential for decreased idea-sharing and a narrower window of application.

Since I am approaching an underdeveloped, yet fundamental, idea and value within S&I, I thought it would be beneficial to explore these ideas within a format that could foster increased idea sharing and minimize groupthink, while still drawing on the faculty cohesion. I thought a combination of CoP groups and traditional faculty-wide inservice would encourage faculty members to think in divergent ways since perspectives and approaches were less concrete, while concurrently cross pollinating those ideas among other groups to further develop initial thoughts into potential actions and build faculty cohesion. Using this approach, I wanted to evaluate (a) what helps develop a more effective home-centered, Seminary-supported paradigm and approaches and (b) what effect the pods have on collaboration among the faculty on this topic of interest.

To set the context for the data that was collected throughout this study, I first share a few study limitations. Following this, is an exploration of the triangulation of data received through the qualitative and quantitative results of this mixed methods study. Following the discussion of the results, I integrate both the quantitative and

qualitative strands to explore a few findings for both a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach and to assess the effect that the CoPs had on faculty collaboration and accountability. These findings suggested a few recommendations within the system of S&I. This chapter concludes with a few reflections on what this journey with action research and communities of practice within S&I taught me.

Limitations of the Study

As with any study, potential limitations emerged. First, this study operated on an unanticipated, condensed timeframe. Due to some unexpected delays in receiving approval to implement the study and unanticipated limitations concerning study participants, the project started a month later than anticipated yet met the original ending date. This situation only permitted two CoP gatherings, interspersed with three inservice meetings and the focus-group discussion. Second, local Church officials did not approve having students and their parents as study participants. Thus, the study focused only on teachers' input and reactions. Third, the study involves only one faculty. Although this faculty is diverse in many socioeconomic ways, specific situations and circumstances within this context may not apply to other similar yet different scenarios.

Data Analysis

Throughout the duration of the study, data was gathered through both qualitative and quantitative strategies. Data collection occurred concurrently, with a pre- and post-survey providing quantitative information. Qualitative data was obtained through observations at an initial inservice and during CoP discussions, during the final

two inservice sessions, and a focus group discussion at the conclusion of the study.

Results of data collected during the quantitative strand are shared first, followed by a

discussion of findings from qualitative data. All names are pseudonyms to preserve the

confidentiality of study participants.

Quantitative Results Discussion

The quantitative data was generated via a pre-survey and a post-survey. Each

survey included both multiple-choice and free-response questions. For the multiple-

choice questions, each participant read a statement and rated it according to a Likert-

model with five response options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither agree

nor disagree, Somewhat agree, or Strongly agree. To provide statistical analysis, each

response was assigned a number in ascending order, with Strongly disagree = 1 and

Strongly agree = 5. The results present some nuances that provide additional insight

about the study participants' assessment of the project (see Table 4.1). For example, the

participants' responses indicate that the study positively impacted their belief that they

could help to create a home-centered, Seminary supported gospel learning approach

within their classes. They also indicated that the study increased their positive feelings

toward a collaborative approach, especially within their pods.

At the beginning of the study, participants generally thought they had a good

understanding of what a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach

meant. They expressed similar views when asked to evaluate the importance of having

this learning approach within their classes. However, when asked about their practices

as a Seminary teacher, they reported that they less commonly applied principles

Table 4.1

Comparing Pre- and Post-Survey Results

Question	Pre-Survey Mean	Pre-Survey SD	Post-Survey Mean	Post-Survey SD	Diff in Mean	Diff in SD
1. I understand what is meant by a home-centered, Seminary-supported Gospel learning approach	4.25	0.92	4.5	0.5	0.25	-0.42
2. As a Seminary teacher, I feel well-prepared to implement a home-centered, Seminary-suported learning and teaching approach	3.33	1.11	3.92	0.49	0.59	-0.62
3. I think home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach is important for the success of Gospel learning within the Church.	4.25	1.09	4.58	0.64	0.33	-0.45
4. I think home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach is important for the success of Gospel learning within Seminaries and Institutes	4.33	0.85	4.67	0.47	0.34	-0.38
5. I think home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach is important for the success of Gospel learning within the lives of my students	4.17	1.28	4.42	0.64	0.25	-0.64
6. I frequently consider how to encourage a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach during my lesson preparation	1.92	0.64	3.08	0.95	1.16	0.31
7. I frequently consider how to encourage a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach when communicating with parents of my students	2.75	1.01	3.58	1.04	0.83	0.03
8. I frequently consider how to encourage a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach when contacting my students' priesthood leaders	2.17	0.9	3.25	0.83	1.08	-0.07
9. I frequently consider how to encourage a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach when interacting with students regarding their personal development	3.58	1.04	4	0.82	0.42	-0.22
10. I feel comfortable evaluating my success with facilitating a home-centered Gospel learning approach for my students and their families	3.75	1.23	3.58	1.11	-0.17	-0.12
11. I think that I am helping my students and their families to be more successful with their home-centered Gospel learning	3.42	0.76	3.67	0.47	0.25	-0.29
12. I value collaboration with other Seminary teachers as an important mode of personal learning and development	4.83	0.37	4.92	0.28	0.09	-0.09
13. I feel comfortable participating in a collaborative discussion regarding learning and teaching with faculty members	4.75	0.43	4.92	0.28	0.17	-0.15
14. I think that experimenting with various methods and approaches in the classroom is an important part of learning how to better facilitate learner understanding	4.75	0.6	4.75	0.43	0	-0.17
15. I frequently collaborate with other Seminary teachers regarding how to improve my efforts with encouraging home-centered Gospel learning	2.83	1.28	3.75	0.5	0.92	-0.78

reinforcing this approach and generally felt less capable of knowing how to do that. Two

questions on the identical surveys had the largest statistical improvement: (a) one that

invited them to consider how frequently they included how to encourage a home-

centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach in their lesson preparation and

(b) another that asked how often they considered that framework in communication

with their students' priesthood (Church) leaders, most commonly bishops.

With a strong culture of collaboration within this Seminary location, study

participants commonly felt comfortable collaborating with their peer teachers. Many

also valued teacher collaboration as an important aspect of professional development.

The pre-survey indicated that many respondents had already developed a level of

comfort with iterative testing and improvement since teachers valued experimenting

with different methods and approaches to improve learner understanding. Despite this

initial high rating, each of these questions related to collaboration also evidenced gains,

with a higher average mean, decreased standard deviation, or both when comparing the

pre- and post-survey results.

The only question that evidenced a decrease in the average mean was Question

10, which explored how confidently respondents thought they could evaluate their own

efforts in facilitating effective home-centered, Seminary supported gospel learning

among the students in their classes and their families. Interestingly, study respondents

believed that they were more capable and more consistent in applying HCGL

approaches but less confident in evaluating the success of those efforts.

Further analysis of this data suggests that the teachers perceived that

participating in the study helped them to understood more clearly what is meant by a

home-centered, Seminary supported gospel learning approach. Additionally, they felt

more confident implementing that approach effectively within a Seminary classroom,

and they found value in the collaborative learning approach. Although they reported

that their skills and capacity increased, they nonetheless felt less confident in their

ability to evaluate the effectiveness of those efforts.

Qualitative Findings Discussion

Since there were several qualitative instruments utilized throughout the study, I

analyzed the data generated within each of them chronologically as they occurred.

Study participants responded to diverse prompts and questions during three inservice

sessions, two CoP discussions, and a focus group discussion at the study's conclusion.

First inservice. Ten of the twelve study participants attended the first inservice

meeting. During this initial discussion, I wanted to review the importance of a home-

centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach and explain the format that we

would implement as we experimented with effective methods to deliver this required

content, particularly within the CoPs. During the discussion of what outcomes the

Seminary and Church leaders hoped to achieve, we discussed the CFM program. Several

faculty members said that although they felt a home-centered approach was important,

they thought that little support had been provided to assure the desired outcomes.

They cited a few institutional adjustments that S&I made to improve the program

delivery at home, such as adjusting the scripture reading requirement and the pacing for

teaching in the Seminary classroom to better support the CFM curriculum. However, none of the teachers could share examples where they had adjusted their teaching approach to support effective gospel learning in the home. Although one teacher reported he sought to increase unity between the home and the Seminary classroom immediately following the introduction of CFM in 2019, he now questioned how many of his current students and their families were currently implementing it. He also asserted sensing that the initial synergy in his classroom had decreased over the past three years.

I introduced the process that we would follow to help teachers increase their ability to support this framework. It included a monthly inservice and a smaller faculty group (called a "pod") between each inservice. Within each pod, teachers would discuss what they had implemented to support HCGL and the effects of those actions. A few teachers initially questioned why the pod discussions were needed because the content seemed repetitive; some asserted that the outcomes could be achieved during a broad faculty discussion. Nevertheless, each participant agreed to test this approach by leveraging both pods and inservice faculty discussions.

First community of practice discussion. Each study participant was assigned to one of three different CoP (i.e., pod) with four faculty members. Each pod was formed by grouping faculty members according to the approximate location of their office within the building. With two student teachers participating, each of whom had an office in the building, they were also treated the same. This meant that they were in

separate groups with three full-time teachers. To maintain anonymity among these pods, each was assigned a color (i.e., red, blue, green).

At the beginning of each initial pod discussion, I reminded the teachers that these pods gather to (a) share what members had done to support gospel learning in the home more effectively and (b) explore how they could adapt or improve upon those efforts. I also explained that although I would attend each pod meeting and could help facilitate the conversation, they should not rely solely on me to guide the conversation. Recognizing that each group might require a different amount of support, I prepared a few questions that could help initiate and guide the conversation, as needed. I started the discussion within each pod with a question that invited them to reflect on what they had been thinking and doing to develop an effective home-centered, Seminary supported gospel learning approach and what effects they had noticed from their actions. Before each pod concluded, I also invited pod members to set a goal about what they wanted to do or what they could change to better develop this approach.

Red pod. Each member attended this pod discussion. They began sharing the specific actions that they had done or were doing, especially within their classrooms, to support a HCGL model. For example, Matthew shared that he recently began class by inviting students to text their parents about experiences they had from paying a faithful tithe. As they received texts in response to their questions, he invited them to wait to share those experiences until near the end of class. Although he did not initially do this to support HCGL, he realized afterwards that it had that outcome. Additionally, Steven noted that he was finding success through a small at-home assignment that his students

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completed in preparation for each class. He reported that each assignment was found on a simple website that he created at the beginning of the semester and most of the invitations focused on visiting with a parent or sibling about a topic that he would later address in class.

The conversation shifted when Alex raised a question about what it meant or did not mean to have home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning, especially considering CFM. He noted that some families appeared to actively implement this program, whereas others seemed to struggle to get started. He also asked how teachers would know if something would support students and their families, with so many different unique situations and circumstances scattered throughout the classroom. Matthew shared that perhaps they should explore the program via a broadened view. The purpose is not simply to support CFM but rather to encourage gospel learning and development within the home. Steven agreed, noting that one of the main roles given to Seminary teachers within the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* manual is to support parents (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2012). Alex added that it is often difficult to know how to help parents when teachers do not understand what an effective home gospel learning experience is. He resolved to gain greater understanding about expectations for successful home learning experiences, what support his students needed, and how to support efforts by the parents to build connection and understanding.

Blue pod. For this discussion, only Moses was missing. Group members began the session by discussing how little gospel learning, especially in the form of CFM,

appeared to be happening in their students' homes. Scott and James related their own families' experiences where they discuss CFM weekly. Peter also shared that a student last year asked why they discussed the same things at home, Church, and Seminary, noting that he did not perceive that same sentiment this year.

As the teachers discussed how they might help support HCGL, they focused on how they might more effectively support the parents and guardians of their students. In previous years, James and Scott sent newsletters home, with minimal responses from parents or other family members. As they discussed what they could do now, they considered readjusting the previously used format to encourage more effective conversations and interactions between the youths and their parents. Scott decided to create a newsletter with a question that he would ask each youth to come prepared to answer during their next Seminary class. He decided that even if no parents responded to his email message, it would show them that he supports their gospel learning efforts.

Green pod. Three of the four members of this pod came to this discussion because Nancy could not attend. As the conversation began, it became apparent that no group members had implemented anything to date. Emily, who has been teaching for just over a year, shared that she had not considered this framework until attending the previous inservice. As the discussion progressed, the pod members began to explore what it means to have a HCGL approach and how Seminary can provide an effective supporting role. Emily and Barry cautioned everyone against a Seminary lesson feeling too much like their Church and home gospel learning experiences, even though similar material would be covered. However, Carson also noted the danger in simply doing

something different for the sake of variety, rather than doing it to support at-home learning.

Barry expressed the importance of increasing student participation to enhance and deepen the Seminary learning experience, for the individual student and their classmates. Both Emily and Carson agreed that would be important for their classrooms to succeed too. Otherwise, it would not enhance a home-centered approach. Each then set different goals to encourage greater involvement in the CFM scripture chapters, both in Seminary and at-home.

Second inservice. Almost all the study participants attended at least part of the second inservice, with only Moses and James not in attendance. Primed by their pod conversations, participants shared a variety of ideas at the beginning of the session. Their ideas spurred additional conversations in which they further developed the concept of a home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach. For example, Matthew reaffirmed the charge given to teachers to help teach the youth in Seminary so they can engage in better conversations and learning experiences at home and at Church. Although Seminary teachers and students benefit when something done at Church or in the home helps to create a spiritual experience in Seminary, a Seminary teacher's responsibility is to encourage and facilitate those experiences in each student's home. Nancy also shared a recent experience where a student had taken something that they had learned at Seminary and taught it at home. The general conversation indicated greater understanding of the desired home-centered, Seminary-supported framework.

Following the discussion of best practices during the second inservice, I used pods as the means to discuss principles presented in two different video clips, which included a thought-provoking question to guide those discussions. Since the group dynamics within each pod were still developing, I wanted to provide additional opportunities for them to interact and engage comfortably with each other. Because some participants arrived late and others had to leave early, I invited the blue pod and green pod members to meet together. The first clip was from a *60 Minutes* episode with the founder of IDEO, David Kelley ("The Deep Dive: One Company's Secret Weapon for Innovation," 1999). In the first video, Kelley discusses the principle of empathy or understanding the needs of the end-user and preparing products and services that help meet those needs. The ensuing pod discussions focused on members trying to understand the needs of individual students while balancing the needs of the curriculum expectations. The red pod also explored how an individual's wants might differ from her or his needs and how to focus thoughtfully on a student's needs.

The second video clip featured Don Clarke, the former president of Lord & Taylor, who discussed the importance of providing effective and meaningful feedback that produces positive, recognizable benefits (Clarke, 2013). Teachers in all three pods struggled to understand and apply this principle. The green and blue pod combination continued to discuss the previous video regarding empathy. One member dismissed the validity of Clark's example because his experiences were within a business context while they work in an educational context. Similarly, the red pod reverted to their discussion about empathy and giving students what they really needed. At the end of this

inservice, study participants were invited to consider what they should do now to support gospel learning in the home. Despite some learning by the teachers, I perceived that this inservice did not fully accomplish what I had hoped.

Second community of practice discussion. Unlike the first pod discussions in which I actively facilitated much of the discussion, during the second CoP session I remained somewhat quiet and observed what the teachers shared and did. Since pod members had a better idea of what to expect, they prepared for and conducted the pod meeting largely without my involvement. At the end of their discussions, I again invited each participant to make a goal about how they would continue, adapt, or begin something that they thought would help encourage a home-centered, Seminary supported gospel learning approach.

Red pod. All three members of the red pod attended the second meeting. Matthew, Steven, and Sterling began the discussion by sharing how they had encouraged students to text their parents a question that related to principles that they were learning that day. Near the end of class, the teachers invited students to share the parent responses that they had received with the rest of the class. Each found that their students responded well to this. Steven also shared an experience that occurred when he discussed the early Church history practice of polygamy. Unbeknownst to him, this had led to a conversation at home between a mother and her daughter. The mother later shared with him how grateful she was that Steven had addressed the topic in an open, candid, and faith-filled way because of how it had positively impacted her daughter.

Midway through their discussion, I asked how empathy guided their decisions and approaches. Matthew shared the importance of asking questions with sensitivity for a variety of different personal and family situations. Sterling and Matthew reported their interacting with parents regarding student behavior in the classroom, especially with the excessive use of cell phones by students. Matthew reiterated the success that he had found when he not only communicated with parents regarding excessive cell phone use but also to reinforce positive behavior. Alex closed the meeting by sharing that he would strive to contact parents through emails to better understand the situation of each youth in his classes.

Blue pod. Faculty members in the blue pod began their conversation with discussing a newsletter that Scott had prepared to send out later that day; however, Moses who did not join this discussion either. James suggested that it might be helpful to include questions from CFM within the newsletter so the Seminary could reinforce what Church leaders asked parents and families to do. Scott shared that he had begun each class with a CFM devotional linked to the weekly CFM assignment. After providing students some time to study these scriptural passages, a few students then shared something that they had learned. To assure that all students had an opportunity to share, he rolls a die to randomize who gets to share each day.

James reported that he recently found himself making more phone calls home, discussing CFM more in his classes, and asking his students more often if they had any insights that they would like to share from their discussion at home. Partly through the conversation, Scott stated: "I like this discussion because it helps me to understand

better what it means to support the home." Peter confessed that he is still struggling to know how to support the home, aside from teaching the same selection of scripture that families and Sunday school teachers are simultaneously discussing at home and at Church. The pod did not settle on a concrete definition about how to approach that challenge, but they agreed to experiment with the newsletter to see if that action would enhance gospel learning in the home.

Green pod. All members of this pod attended the session and actively participated, often highlighting several different examples of how they naturally and normally invite their students to participate in HCGL experiences. For example, Emily shared that a lesson in class had progressed differently than she had anticipated. Thus, she sent an email home to parents to tell them about the experience and invite them to have an additional conversation with their teens to clarify any potential misunderstandings. She said that about one-third of the parents replied to her email in which they expressed appreciation for her telling them. Additionally, Nancy shared the contents of two conversations that she had with students during which she encouraged them to talk with their parents and report the challenges they were facing. Then, she invited her students to prepare a plan about how they would present their concerns with parents. She shared that both students reported being appreciative for her advice and even provided additional tools that they and their parents had developed together.

Third inservice. All but two study participants attended this inservice. Consistent with the previous inservice, this session began with participants sharing what they had tested and observed from their efforts to establish a more HCGL approach for the youth

in their classrooms. They shared a dozen different ideas involving parent

communication, teaching approaches, and mindset adjustments.

After the second inservice, I thought that many teachers had lingering questions

or misunderstandings regarding two principles, (a) the role of empathy in teaching and

(b) some continued not to seek the most effective solutions for students and their

families. During two of the most recent pod discussions, I asked about empathy and

received several confused looks. When it was first introduced during the second

inservice, I relied on pod discussions to further develop their understanding about the

power of empathy. Unfortunately, it appeared that my strategy led to divergent thinking

among the study participants—rather than shared understanding. Since I thought

understanding these two principles would contribute greatly to their success, the

inservice included a review of both of those key principles, including carefully worded

questions to gauge and develop further understanding.

After reviewing both of those principles, participants explored the historical

context behind *Official Declaration 2* (OD2), a statement made in 1978 by the First

Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that allowed all worthy male members

of the Church, age 12 and older, to receive the priesthood (The Church of Jesus Christ of

Latter-day Saints, 1978). I thought this historical event, which was something the

teachers would soon teach in their Seminary classes, provided a unique case study for

how to work collaboratively to find solutions to challenging situations, since

collaborative efforts within each pod have potential for growth.

In addition to exploring parallels within the historical narrative with their collaborate efforts, the teachers also made several connections between OD2 and encouraging a HCGL approach. For example, James noted that students should "get [their] revelation at home, so when we teach in class, we are confirming what [they] have learned there." Coinciding with this assertion, Carson shared that a family should "take [each family member's] questions and struggles and carry them together." Scott resonated with a quote that I shared from Spencer Kimball, who served as the President of the Church at the time of Official Declaration 2. Kimball shared that his experiences had taught him that he must often stretch "on his tiptoes" for answers to vexing questions before those answers come (Kimball, 2008, p. 46). Scott then questioned aloud if he desired answers to questions about how to support HCGL that badly.

Focus group discussion. All but one study participant was able to engage in the focus group discussion. Most of the conversation focused on their evaluation of the faculty pods, which were widely appreciated. They expressed a desire for more faculty inservice activities—particularly if the format was similar to the faculty-pod model.

In addition, several teachers shared several anecdotal experiences that suggested to them that HCGL was either happening at an increased rate than before or that they were more aware of when it was happening within the lives of their students. For example, Sterling attempted to contact a student's parents several times to see how he was doing at home because this young man had begun to attend Seminary class inconsistently. Although Sterling did not get any responses immediately from the student's parents, they later contacted him to share that their son's grandfather had

recently died. Sterling shared with his school colleagues that providing this information

helped him know how to help support this young man.

When we discussed additional strategies that might help implement the HCGL

approach more effectively, several faculty members commented that increased parental

communication was vital. They found it difficult to support the home as a Seminary if a

Seminary teacher and the parents or guardians were not communicating. Hence, some

teacher often sent either a text message or email message to parents expressing

appreciation for something specific that a youth had done or said in class. Nancy

suggested that the faculty could create a repository of different ideas and approaches

that would facilitate a home-centered, Seminary supported gospel learning approach.

Because she often forgets effective strategies mentioned during discussions with her

colleagues, she suggested creating an electronic reference guide, which others could

view and add strategies they used that were effective. Several others supported this

idea.

The participants noted many positive gains that they have seen within both their

classes and individual students, which they asserted was due to the recently

implemented home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach. Not only

had many teachers grown in their confidence to support this learning approach, but

also, they had enhanced their communication patterns with other faculty members,

especially regarding this topic.

Free responses on surveys. Several free-response questions were included on

both the pre-survey and post-survey in addition to multiple-choice questions utilizing a

Likert-scale rating format. These free-response questions on both surveys invited study participants to (a) consider their role in home-centered Seminary supported gospel learning, (b) evaluate the strategies they used to encourage student learning, and (c) review how they evaluated their success in those efforts. The post-survey also asked respondents to assess both their participation in and perceived benefits from collaborative learning experiences with their fellow faculty members.

While analyzing the qualitative responses generated on both the pre- and post-surveys, it appeared to me that the teachers provided more consistently well drafted and substantive answers in their post-survey responses, when compared to similar questions posed in the pre-survey. For example, one question asked, "What methods of encouragement do you find most helpful [in encouraging a HCGL approach]?" In the pre-survey, four respondents said that they were unsure how to respond to that question, while the others provided either a general and vague answer or focused on encouraging and reinforcing daily scripture study. Conversely, in the post-survey, each participant provided concrete examples, many of which were unique. Several teachers highlighted the importance of working with students one-on-one or through parental correspondence. Others expressed appreciation for hearing their peers' ideas, particularly those that encouraged students and supported families in this collaborative learning. Although many teachers still appear not fully settled about which approaches would be most helpful to them and their students, their responses indicate greater comfortability concerning how to support HCGL and how to encourage students and their families to participate.

Findings

To assist me in analyzing qualitative data, I used Dedoose, which has a high

computing ability, intuitive software, and reasonable cost. I uploaded each transcript

and a set of observation notes to provide cross comparisons between the different

documents. Using the quantitative survey questions as a guide, I created nineteen codes

that I then used to compare and synthesize the data. These separations within the

qualitative data also created natural comparisons between the free-response survey

data and observational notes. Within the documents, 421 applications of those codes

were made, which provided rich analysis. As I studied these cross-comparisons, two key

themes emerged: (a) the development of home-centered, Seminary-supported learning

approaches and (b) the influence of communities of practice.

Home-Centered, Seminary-Supported Learning Approaches

Since the study focused on increasing home-centered, Seminary-supported

gospel learning, several things were learned about how the thinking and instructional

approaches of study participants developed in this regard. Data gathered through

multiple methods over time suggest that the study participants recognized many gains

and developed new thinking. I think that these developments were most readily seen

within the participants' adjusted paradigms regarding this approach and the methods

that they used to encourage HCGL.

Paradigm adjustment. An analysis of the data suggests that multiple experiences

helped to develop teachers' interpretation and view of home-centered, Seminary-

supported gospel learning. Like the effect of corrective lenses on deficient eyes, these

paradigms appeared to affect the way that study participants viewed the problem and sought to find solutions. The data revealed two common strains of their developing paradigm: (a) an understanding of what it meant for Seminary teachers to teach and act in a home-centered way and (b) an increased awareness of when HCGL occurred.

What home-centered learning means. When this study began with administration of the pre-survey and then the initial inservice meeting, several participants commented on how they valued a HCGL approach. Over time, they began to realize that they had not implemented meaningful approaches that would help to achieve the desired outcomes. Similar themes continued to emerge during that that inservice and subsequent pod discussions. For example, during her first pod meeting, Emily initiated the discussion by noting that prior to this study, she had not even thought about home-centered, Seminary supported gospel learning.

As study participants began discussing and implementing a *home-centered learning pattern*, it became evident that teachers would often use this phrase and assume that everyone understood each other. They began to realize that the phrase meant something different for each of them. For example, during the first pod meeting for the red group, Alex shared that he saw the results of HCGL in rich class discussions where students shared things that they had learned at home. Matthew asserted that perhaps home-centered learning included more than just supporting the CFM program. During the next inservice session, Scott reinforced this idea when he read from the *Gospel Teaching and Learning* manual that Seminary and Institute teachers are to

> primarily assist parents by teaching students the Gospel of Jesus Christ as found in the scriptures and the words of the prophets, emphasizing the doctrinal

importance of the family and the high priority that family members in family activities deserve. (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion, 2012, p. 8)

Comments by other faculty members suggested that Scott's expanded understanding among other faculty members. Now "HCGL" did not just mean reinforcing CFM. It included reinforcing and facilitating meaningful gospel learning experiences among family members.

During the next inservice meeting, a similar conversation occurred. Nancy shared that she had students who struggled to share what they learned at home about the CFM assignment on Monday since they were just beginning to study those chapters at home as a family. Matthew quickly responded that situation may be okay because the Monday experiences provide teachers an opportunity to prepare students to take home what they learn in Seminary. Thus, they can add to and support the conversations with family members at home. Emily later referred to this framework during the final focus group discussion as significant for her because she changed how she approached things with her students. She described how she began to focus less on what information the students brought to class and more on what they knew at the end of class. She further shared,

> I was more aware in my lesson prepping, not just what do I want them to learn but what would be something that these kids would want to share with their families.

Near the end of the study, a student came up to her after class and shared excitedly that he wanted to go home and share with his family what he had learned that day, even though she had not suggested their doing that before class ended.

During the focus group, Moses shared that he had also begun to focus more on what his students learned outside of his classroom and particularly at home. He perceived they had begun to become more aware of what they learned outside of Seminary and had seen that they were beginning to share more about those experiences with others. He said, "I think they are recognizing that they can have experiences learning about Christ outside of Seminary." He added that they were coming to understand that they can "learn about Him at home, rather than just here."

Survey responses suggest a similar pattern. Study-participant responses on the pre-survey indicated that they thought their role in encouraging HCGL was to teach doctrine, invite students to do things, especially study their scriptures, and be willing to continue discussions and resolve lingering questions that students might have from their gospel learning experiences outside the Seminary classroom. Several survey respondents seemed unsure about their role in supporting HCGL. Responses on the post-survey by two study participants suggest that they were still unsure how to respond to that prompt. However, the other ten study participants seemed to have clarified their role, based on their responses. For example, they thought that should extend meaningful invitations to their students, advise the students to seek answers from their parents and other family members, reinforce what students learned at home, provide meaningful classroom discussions to help students fill gaps in their understanding, send additional material home to supplement home learning, teach about the importance of seeking answers from family members, or have more effective parent communication. Although each study participant did not appear to think that

their understanding of how to support HCGL was complete, it did appear that participating in the study expanded their understanding.

   Increased awareness of home-centered learning. During the first inservice when the topic of HCGL and the collaborative process of iterative development was introduced, Nancy stated that she looked forward to learning how this experience would increase her awareness of the home-centered activities that she was already doing. This theme of discovery became a consistent thread throughout the study. Although participants shared a variety of activities that they carefully considered and implemented to support learning in the home, several noticed how their awareness of home-centered learning influenced their thinking and approaches used while they were teaching a lesson. That growing awareness also influenced other interactions with students, parents, and Church leaders.

   During the final focus group discussion, Matthew shared that home-centered learning was a "much larger part of my thinking, both when I am preparing [lessons] and when I am teaching." While participating in an earlier pod meeting, he shared a similar insight: "I kind of saw opportunities that I wouldn't have seen before, because . . . it became more a part of my mindset." Both Carson and Moses shared a similar sentiment since they had begun to include this new approach regularly in their personal prayers. Nancy shared that during two separate conversations that she had with youth in her classes, she encouraged them to do things that would connect them with their families. According to these teachers, changes in their thinking and actions had very positive

results: It helped to connect the teenagers with their parent or guardian and to provide them additional resources to help address the challenges that they faced.

Regarding interactions that study participants had with parents, a few noticed positive things that occurred during some actions and conversations. James began to text parents about positive behaviors that he saw in class, which he felt fostered additional teacher-parent communication. Similarly, Matthew shared that he had positively reinforced behavior by a young woman in one of his classes through an email message he sent to her parents. The mother and father responded separately with appreciation for the message. In the father's message, he explained that his daughter had shared some of the things that she was learning with her family. After a particularly challenging lesson, Emily sent a follow-up email to the parents of her class explaining what happened and inviting them to continue the conversation that she had started at home. She was surprised how many parents responded with appreciation that she had involved them and made them aware of that situation.

This awareness also extended to conversations that teachers had with local Church leaders. For example, while Sterling was having dinner with a local bishop, he asked what some of the challenges that this church leader saw the youth in his congregation experiencing. He wanted to know how Seminary teachers could support the parents and Church leaders. Sterling asserted that the conversation helped to increase his understanding of the youth and their current situations, which made it easier for him to prepare lessons that addressed some the challenges his students were experiencing.

Methods supporting home-centered gospel learning. In addition to modified thought paradigms, a variety of ideas were shared and implemented by study participants to encourage HCGL. During an inservice meeting, Nancy reported that she had become more aware of home-centered comments from her students. The data gathered during this study suggests that many teachers experienced an increased awareness. This increasing sensitivity to HCGL, and the resulting methods that teachers focused on implementing, could largely be grouped into three different categories: (a) lesson preparation and teaching, (b) interactions with parents, and (c) interactions with individual students.

Lesson preparation and teaching. Most of the carefully planned approaches that study participants implemented to support HCGL revolved around what teachers did to prepare for specific lessons. In many Seminary classrooms, each lesson begins with an opening devotional. Although each teacher organizes their devotional differently, most include at least an opening prayer, an opening hymn, and some type of scriptural thought. Several participants shared ideas about how to make this scriptural thought more home centered. For example, James invites his students to share their parent or guardian's favorite scripture and why it is important to them. Scott shared what he saw while observing a substitute teacher in James' class: The student assigned to share the scripture had forgotten to ask his parents the night before. He quickly texted his dad, who responded immediately with the needed information. This scenario evidenced for Scott how a parent can actively engage in the program. Another example is when Nancy invited her students to teach about some important scripture verses. Although she

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began this pattern before the study began, she decided to emphasize and encourage her students to share key topics within discussions at home. She recalled a time that a student asked her about a verse that he needed to teach. She shared, "I suggested to ask his parents about it. He was hesitant because he thought that it would be weird that he was studying." She used this opportunity to encourage home-centered gospel discussions even if it felt weird to this young man.

Alternately, Barry created a more standardized approach to introduce each lesson. He divided his students into different groups and assigned them each a portion from CFM for which they were responsible to present in class. As he experimented with this strategy, he learned that the students often needed more preparation time and reminders. He began to remind them about a week and a half before they were to share in class what they learned. He noticed that these experiences increased student engagement because they were preparing to share and teach their class.

Study participants also shared a variety of other ideas about how to involve parents or guardians during a lesson. One strategy was texting parents a question at the beginning of class and then inviting students to share what their parents had written later during the lesson.

Since there may often be close parallels between what teachers could discuss in Seminary and what parents could teach at home, Barry initially shared his discomfort during his first pod meeting,

> I think this [home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning approach] makes our job a little harder. If we get a surface lesson, they've already had that. We've got to peel back the layers. It's a little bit of our challenge. We want to

help light the desire and help the students to go deeper with what they've already studied.

However, over time he appeared to become less concerned about that. During the next pod meeting, he shared that he "almost exclusively" used the CFM curriculum without any apparent feelings of redundancy in his classes. Throughout the study, Alex and Peter shared similar thoughts about being less concerned about the possibility of redundancy than when Church leaders first introduced CFM.

Steven used a class website where he encouraged students to review something (i.e., a question, a video, verses from scripture) in preparation for their classroom learning experience. He said that he often posed questions to his students during class that would hopefully encourage home-centered gospel discussions with their parents. He also held class competitions or utilized other follow-up methods to encourage them to review the questions provided in the curriculum. He admitted that in some of his classes the students were consistently involved, while in other classes his students were not as engaged.

Interactions with parents. Although the Church did not approve including parents as participants in this study, the participating teachers reported during the final focus group discussion and via the responses on the open-ended survey questions that developing a strong communicative relationship with parents was important. Throughout the study, they shared different ideas about how to do this. On two different occasions, Sterling commented that it was easier to prepare lessons with specific individuals and their circumstances in mind. To foster this strategy, he shared how he wanted to connect with parents through an online form or survey of some sort

where he would invite them to share what challenges their teenagers faced. Alex similarly asserted that understanding what his students experienced at home would help him know how to support the home-based component of the program. James noticed a natural increase in parent communication when he focused on ways to support gospel learning in the home.

After discussing a particular topic during class, Steven received an email from a mother of one of his students. She expressed appreciation for the class discussion on that topic. Her daughter had come home with an understanding of some of those foundational concepts. They had a long discussion that not only helped her daughter to understand the concepts but also further developed their relationship.

Members of the blue pod decided to create a newsletter that would allow them to regularly communicate with parents. They thought that this would permit them to inform parents about what was being discussed and encourage their teenagers to consider questions from CFM prior to a classroom discussion. Scott sent a newsletter home once, which did not achieve his intended purpose. When he mentioned sending the newsletter to students during a class meeting, they reported that none of their parents had discussed the content of the newsletter with the teenagers.

Interactions with individual students. The program also influenced the way that teachers interacted with individual students. Sometimes students invited teacher support for their home-centered learning efforts. For example, one of Carson's students shared with him that she was trying to establish a habit of daily scripture study but needed additional direction and purpose to make her independent studies become

more meaningful. When he mentioned this during an inservice, Matthew asked if she

was studying CFM. He was puzzled because his experience had shown him that CFM

naturally established purpose and perspective of what to seek in personal and family

scripture studies.

Nancy shared that one of her students had struggled to feel important since her

estranged mom had died a month earlier and she last saw her dad when she was 12

years old. Nancy suggested that she contact her dad to begin compiling some

information that would enable her to do family history and become more informed

about her deceased family members. When this young woman returned to class, she

excitedly told Nancy that her dad was going to send her the death certificate for her

mom to serve as a starting place for her search.

Many other unique ideas about how to support HCGL were shared by study

participants throughout this research. For a full compilation of these methods, see

Appendix E in this dissertation.

Communities of Practice

A central component of this study was implementation of CoPs within the school

community. Before the study launched, a strong culture of collaboration already existed

within the Seminary faculty. Their comfort and consistency with collaboration was

evidenced in their responses on the pre-survey. In this first data-collection opportunity,

the study participants rated the culture of collaboration within the educators'

community. Their responses evidenced significant comfort with participating in

collaborative experiences among peers. Some of this comfort may have developed

earlier through the faculty's common practice of gathering for 20-25 minutes on two different days each week to discuss upcoming lesson ideas. Additionally, lesson ideas were already periodically exchanged among many faculty members. Informal conversations regarding curricula, class activities, students, and lesson plans were already a common part of the faculty culture.

The introduction of multiple CoPs was, however, an unfamiliar mode of collaboration for the faculty. Although occasional informal discussions with a few other faculty members occurred often, formal discussions about teaching normally happened among the entire faculty when the seminary principal led a discussion. When the faculty gathered to collaborate future lesson plans, the format resembled interactions among members of a CoP. During these discussions, each faculty member had the opportunity to share how they thought they would approach an upcoming lesson, inviting additional ideas and feedback from other faculty members and helping to provide a variety of approaches for teachers to use within their classrooms. However, the faculty pods, or CoPs, would break up the faculty into smaller discussion groups that would meet regularly, an unfamiliar practice to them.

Once they began meeting as a CoP, data gathered from the study participants suggests that they viewed these CoPs as very beneficial. Within their responses, participants commonly mentioned three benefits: collaborative discussions, personal accountability, and iterative thinking.

Collaborative discussions. According to the data received from study participants, their opinions about and comfort level towards intra-faculty collaboration

improved throughout the duration of the study. Although many teachers valued collaboration and felt comfortable engaging with their peers before the study, both the mean and standard deviation improved between administration of the pre-survey and the post-survey. That is, analyses revealed a higher average score and reduced data spread when the results of the pre- and post-surveys were compared.

According to analysis of the free-response survey data, several participants indicated on the initial survey that collaboration did not play much of a role in developing their personal teaching paradigms or pedagogy about HCGL. However, in analysis of the post-survey responses, the same question yielded a different response. Each participant shared that the collaborative discussions enhanced their understanding of their role in supporting the new program. Although reported as beneficial, collaboration with peers did not resolve all their concerns. For example, one participant noted on the second survey, "I have loved the collaborative times, but have found it harder to implement in class." When examining the post-survey responses of participants, I found they consistently identified one of two primary benefits: (1) The cooperative learning experience helped them to refine their paradigm regarding a HCGL approach, and (2) cooperative learning helped to expand their thinking about different approaches that they could utilize.

During the focus group discussion, I explored what role their faculty pods and inservice discussions had played in developing their understanding of a HCGL approach. Their comments largely focused on the benefits that they saw within the pod meetings. For example, Matthew shared that he thought that they could discuss specific ideas in

greater depth within the pod discussions compared to discussions during inservice meetings. Nancy thought the combination of the two was helpful because the inservice meeting helped to instruct and focus her thinking and it provided a means for teachers to share a variety of ideas between pods. She also expressed appreciation for the pod discussions, something she sensed quickly because she attended only one of the two pod meetings with her group.

These face-to-face pod discussions appeared to be more effective than virtual or electronic discussions for the group members. Members of the three groups decided to organize a group text to facilitate communication. However, none of the three groups utilized it for anything other than coordinating when to hold the next group meeting. When discussing this, Nancy shared that the group discussions electronically did not take off because "you have too much to explain."

Personal accountability. A benefit that I did not anticipate emerged in the responses on the post-survey and during the focus group discussion—the importance of accountability that naturally occurred during the pod discussions. On the post-survey, one participant responded positively to a question about participating in future collaborative discussions.

> Darn right. It was an amazing experience. It not only helps me to learn new ways, but it holds me accountable to keep up my efforts to cultivate a seminary supported, home centered experience.

After they completed this survey, the focus group discussion began with an invitation to share additional insights about the study. During the focus group, I posed a question about the benefits they received by participating in the pod discussions.

Sterling shared that the format helped him to feel responsible to be prepared to participate. He noted, "I just felt very accountable each time to come to the meeting with something worth sharing."

This natural accountability was evident throughout the progression of the project-provided services. During the study, three inservices were conducted. The first (a) provided an overview of what the study hoped to accomplish, (b) explored the importance of helping to establish a home-centered, Seminary supported gospel learning approach, and (c) explained the pod system and how the study volunteers were expected to participate. The final two inservices were conducted in early November and late November, each with a different purpose and focus. At the beginning of each inservice, participants had an opportunity to share what they had done within the classroom and what they had discussed within their pods. I then provided additional training or support that would help the teachers implement the HCGL approach, whether working independently or with their pod peers.

While examining the ideas presented during the two November meetings, participants shared a similar number of ideas. During the first inservice, teachers shared 12 ideas; however, a few weeks later they shared another 16 ideas, where only 4 were repeated ideas from the previous inservice. Of particular interest were reports about things that they intended to implement in the future and how they shared things that they had already done. For example, during the inservice at the beginning of November, participants had already implemented four new ideas while eight others they planned to do use in the future. In contrast, they shared 4 ideas at the end of November they

planned to put into action and then discussed the 12 things they implemented recently. Thus, it became evident that throughout the study, teachers gradually implemented a more home-centered approach rather than just talking about what they wanted to do.

Iterative thinking. Throughout the study, participants often generated ideas through collaborative discussions. These ideas often developed iteratively as others helped to make improvements throughout the discussion. The blue pod illustrated this process well. During their first discussion, they began identifying a challenge that they could see within their own families before broadening that to other families whose teenagers were in their classes. They noticed that the schedules of the students and their families was often so busy that it became difficult to have regular meaningful scripture study, especially with CFM. While exploring ways that they could help, pod members began discussing ways they could communication more effectively with parents and guardians.

Both Scott and James noted that they had sent newsletters home for students in previous classes. They both recalled that they received few responses from that strategy. Thus, they began exploring ways they could improve their prior format to make it more effective, such as with a video included from their class or with a few questions for the youth and their parents to consider. Near the end of one of these discussions, James noted that this had helped him to consider whether he was really supporting the home and what more he could do.

Two weeks later during an inservice meeting, these pod members shared that they wanted to create a newsletter. When they met next as a pod, they continued to

develop this idea further. Scott initiated the conversation by sharing what he had

integrated into his current newsletter, which included a statement about the purpose of

S&I and a few questions from CFM that parents could ask their teenagers. He also

shared that each student who provided an answer to the questions posed on the

newsletter would receive a bonus treat in class. James shared that he loved the idea and

wanted a copy.

As they continued brainstorming ways to support the home, they realized their

own children who attended Seminary would occasionally bring things home that could

be discussed as a family. James then proposed an idea about sending a daily message

home. Scott suggested that they each try a different approach, with Scott doing it

weekly and James doing it daily to see what the result would be. Peter asked whether

any of the parents would want information. Scott insisted that field testing these

strategies would help him to see what effects might occur. James suggested that they

take the questions directly from the CFM curriculum and thought that a brief text

message may be more effective than an email. Scott then suggested using a video, and

the group members talked through some of the logistics for doing that.

They began to discuss how they could measure the impact of their actions. This

became more challenging since it would be difficult to see the results of a text message

or email on learning in the home within gospel discussions in the Seminary classroom.

This would be especially true if the email or a classroom learning experience prepared

youth for a learning experience at home that did not translate well to a future

experience in Seminary. Peter was especially concerned and had reservations about

whether this intervention would be beneficial. However, both James and Scott decided that they wanted to test their ideas.

During the next inservice meeting, Scott shared that he had sent the newsletter via email to each of his students. During his class that met just before school, none of his students had discussed the key question with their parents. This led him to consider how to support the home more effectively, either through the newsletter or other options.

Throughout the study, it appears that iterative thinking not only developed initial idea but also led to additional ideas for other faculty members. Only 4 of the 12 ideas that participants shared during the inservice at the beginning of November were shared again during the inservice at the end of November. However, the new ideas that study participants shared at the end of November had become more concrete and more fully implemented. As demonstrated during the discussions regarding the newsletter, sometimes a discussion led to the development of a current idea, while at other times, it became a springboard for further discussions about other potential approaches that the participants thought might better support the home.

Recommendations

This study generated insights about school-family collaboration that transformed into recommendations to support gospel-centered learning in the home as well as other ways Seminary teachers could support student growth outside the classroom. A few recommendations include developing a metric to evaluate the difference that each

teacher's efforts are making, establish better communication with parents, and provide longer-term faculty pod discussions.

First, study participants noted throughout the professional development associated with the research that they faced challenges in measuring the impact of their efforts. Recognizing this did not appear to stop them from engaging proactively in seeking to support the home more effectively. Nonetheless, the challenges may have discouraged some at times. Additionally, information regarding the effectiveness of specific attempts would have aided teachers in knowing how to support parents and guardians. As Nancy shared during her faculty pod, "I'm not sure if it happened, but I encouraged it." In lieu of a defined measurement tool, study participants relied upon anecdotal experiences to measure the effectiveness of their efforts to improve HCGL. However, more defined measurement tools could help study participants more accurately evaluate the impact and effectiveness of their efforts. That task, however, may be best accomplished by the Church.

Second, a theme that emerged from focus-group discussions was the importance of developing more effective communication between the teachers and the parents or guardians of these students. Study participants felt this line of communication would help them understand better the students' situation at home, thus enabling them to support the required learning at home. Throughout the study, participants considered communicating with parents in a variety of ways (i.e., text messages, electronic surveys, phone calls, emails). The expressed purpose of these communications varied and included trying to understand what their students experienced in the home, reinforcing

positive behavior in class, and informing parents and guardians about what had been or would be discussed in class. Although study participants regularly shared that they thought this communication was helpful, parents did not respond to all communication. For example, the emailed newsletter did not receive a response from parents or students, whereas Emily's email message led to many parental responses. Developing more effective parent communication appears to be a vital component of effectively supporting a HCGL approach for these Seminary students.

Third, study participants expressed appreciation for collaborative learning experiences, especially the faculty pod discussions. For example, Emily shared during the focus group discussion that although she thought that any concrete conclusions regarding the effectiveness of these pod discussions would be premature, she had already begun to see benefits from those discussions. Although these discussions only occurred twice during the study, participants noticed positive gains from those discussions and expressed a desire to continue engaging in similar formats in the future. A few even expressed a desire for this to be implemented on a worldwide basis. The process of developing group cohesion is well-documented and takes time. To maximize the benefits of these pods, leaders need to form these pods and support their existence for as long as need to maximize the potential benefits (Tuckman, 1965).

Organizational Leadership Practice and Educational Policy

The structure of faculty pods and the combination of traditional inservice and pod discussions placed me in an interesting spot since I am an administrator at the school where this study was conducted. During inservice meetings, I maintained a more

formal teaching role, as both a facilitator and a trainer. At the beginning of each

inservice, I operated more as a facilitator while each pod member had an opportunity to

share briefly what they were doing to implement a more HCGL approach. Then, I would

shift roles and train study participants on the importance of HCGL or help them learn

paradigms and skills that would aid their iterative approaches, both individually and

within their pods. Within the pods and during the portion of inservices where

participants shared ideas, I sought to empower all participants so they would take a

more active role in their pods, resulting in a shared leadership style (Pearce & Conger,

2002).

This shared leadership looked different within different groups and in different

settings. During the beginning of inservice on November 1, when pod members shared

their ideas, I invited each group to share in turn, which developed a more casual and

longer conversation. Although I may have helped to facilitate increased understanding

of and commitment to encouraging a HCGL approach, it left me with inadequate time to

effectively discuss two important principles that I thought would help develop more

effective iterative implementation and pod collaboration. As a result, I took a more

hands-on approach during the next inservice and gave each group a specified amount of

time to share what they had implemented during the previous month. This helped to

focus the conversation, which enabled me to reinforce HCGL while still providing time

for sharing other important information and for training.

Within the pods, my role was different. During the first pod discussion, I was

involved in helping to facilitate conversation. Since the format was simple and similar

during their second meeting, pod members began to share more freely what they had done to encourage HCGL for their student's families. Each pod also required me to be involved in a different way. Depending on the pod dynamic, I might share more or ask additional questions to aid in their iterative development of different ideas and approaches.

These approaches not only developed my leadership abilities, but I think that several participants also enhanced their ability to lead. Many participants gradually become more involved in pod discussions and began to share more specific examples about how they supported HCGL. They often became more confident interacting with other faculty members on this work-related topic, leading to higher rates of involvement than I observed during previous inservices. Although the small group structure helped to facilitate this, I could sense a difference among some teachers as they knew more what to expect during the second pod discussion and thus arrived better prepared to engage actively. Additionally, several teachers began to extend both planned and spontaneous invitations, such as inviting students to do things that would help facilitate gospel learning within the home. These invitations appeared in informal conversations with youth, these youth's parents or Church leaders, or during classroom learning experiences.

Reflections

While considering my experiences conducting this action-research study, several different ideas and observations surfaced. These led to increased introspection and

additional understanding. Following are some of the lessons I learned from designing and conducting this project.

Participating in Action Research

Engaging in action research was a challenging yet beneficial experience. I appreciated the opportunity to employ, in a very practical way, an intervention that facilitated growth and understanding within my specific work context. At first, I struggled to grasp what an action research study would look like, especially in my work environment. However, as the details came together, I appreciated learning how to facilitate focused research within a specific setting. I think that these experiences continue to aid me in work, family, and other community settings. Although the conclusions are more specific than widespread, this approach has helped me to naturally discover effective methods of improvement within a specific context.

My Journey to Communities of Practice

As this study began, I knew that I wanted to do something within the Seminary classroom connected with *Come Follow Me*. However, the type of intervention that I implemented evolved over time. I began with exploring different pedagogical methods, such as flipped classrooms and problem-based learning. Because of how school-community action plans can help to build a bridge between the community and the schools, I also considered how this might play a role. Deeper learning with its emphasis on empathy and iterating prototypes to address the needs of the end-user was also of interest.

However, I was unable to utilize each of these methods. Limitations throughout the approval process adjusted the trajectory, since I could only use Seminary teachers as study participants without including either parents or students. Additionally, my increased understanding of communities of practice led to a course correction as I began to emphasize that mechanism more instead of a specific pedagogical approach. Although I touched on empathy, a portion of deeper learning, even this was minimally addressed. Even though I did not use much of what I began to study, I decided to leave each these concepts in my dissertation since they remain part of my journey—just not my destination.

However, my study did not end up utilizing each of these methods. Limitations throughout the approval process adjusted the trajectory, since I now began to only use Seminary teachers as study participants without including either parents or students. Additionally, my increased understanding of communities of practice led to a course correction as I began to emphasize that mechanism more instead of a specific pedagogical approach. Although I touched on empathy, a portion of deeper learning, even this was minimally addressed. Even though I did not use much of what I began to study, I decided to leave each these concepts in my dissertation since they remain part of my journey—just not my destination.

Merging Traditional Inservice with Communities of Practice

In many traditional inservice settings, the presenter or facilitator is expected to be an expert in the subject matter. They not only help to facilitate conversation but often either guide or stipulate how attendees should apply those concepts. Although

class participation might be plentiful, the teacher or presenter often speaks far more often than those who attend their training. Additionally, it can be difficult and time-consuming to create a productive level of accountability where individuals feel accountable and motivated rather than micromanaged and misunderstood. From my experience, implementing the faculty pods, or communities of practice, help to mitigate a lot of these potential concerns.

Within the small groups, increased learner participation occurred. The structure of these groups created a balance between organized yet organic experiences. During each of the faculty pod discussions, I often spoke less than other pod members. Additionally, I did not need to be an expert in the subject material because the pod members helped each other to encourage the goal of home-centered learning within their classrooms. Each study participant was empowered and trusted to find appropriate ways to encourage home-centered learning within their classroom and amongst their students. Then, each pod member gathered as an equal participant and expert in the subject material of their classroom and personal experiences.

My primary role throughout this study was to help each study participant understand and become committed to HCGL, apply an iterative process of improvement, and maximize the potential of their faculty pods. The format of the pods helped to empower each of the study participants because they shared that they wanted to have something meaningful to present and discuss during the pod discussions. Study participants reported that they enjoyed and appreciated the

experience. Based on my observations, I also noticed that increased participation and more refined thinking patterns occurred throughout the pod experience.

Conclusion

In many work settings, especially educational settings, leaders often expend a lot of resources to enhance learning and capability within their teachers. Inservices often look differently and produce varying levels of effectiveness. Sometimes those who attend these inservices increase their focus and efforts on the intended outcomes. Too often, however, they do not. Within the context of this release-time Seminary, teacher improvement efforts that focused on helping to encourage HCGL approaches for students and their families appeared to improve through a combination of traditional inservices and CoPs. Although the specific study focused on the context of improving HCGL, I think similar studies within other contexts would be worthwhile. Not only did study participants enhance their capability, but they also appeared to expand their ability to facilitate learning effectively, even amongst their peers. Rather than requiring a leader to dispense knowledge, they learned how to effectively learn as a group of interested peers.

APPENDIX A

CoP/Inservice Observation Form

Date: _____

Time: _____

CoP Members: _____

Individual	Notes (i.e., Suggestions, Observations, Plans)

APPENDIX B

Participant Pre-Survey

This information was converted into a Qualtrics format to enable data collection and aggregation.

Date: _____

Each of the questions below will use a Likert-scale range including the following possible responses: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

1. I understand what is meant by a home-centered, Seminary-supported Gospel learning approach.

2. As a Seminary teacher, I feel well-prepared to implement a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning and teaching approach.

3. I think that a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach is important for the success of Gospel learning
   a. within the Church.
   b. within Seminaries and Institutes.
   c. within the lives of my students.

4. I frequently consider how to encourage a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach
   a. during my lesson preparation
   b. when communicating with parents of my students
   c. when contacting my students' priesthood leaders
   d. when interacting with students regarding their personal development

5. I feel comfortable evaluating the success of my efforts with facilitating a home-centered Gospel learning approach for my students and their families.

6. I think that I am helping my students and their families to be more successful with their home-centered Gospel learning.

7. I value collaboration with other Seminary teachers as an important mode of personal learning and development.

8. I feel comfortable participating in a collaborative discussion regarding learning and teaching with faculty members.

9. I think that experimenting with various methods and approaches in the classroom is an important part of learning how to better facilitate learner understanding.

10. I frequently collaborate with other Seminary teachers regarding how to improve my efforts with encouraging home-centered Gospel learning.

Free-Response Questions
1. As a Seminary teacher, what would you say is your role in encouraging and facilitating a home-centered Gospel learning approach?

2. What methods do you most frequently utilize when encouraging a home-centered Gospel learning approach?

3. What methods of encouragement do you find are most helpful in encouraging a home-centered Gospel learning approach?

4. How do you evaluate your success with encouraging your students and their families to participate in a home-centered Gospel learning approach?

5. In what ways do you participate in collaborative learning experiences with faculty members regarding student learning?

6. To what degree do you think these collaborative learning experiences have helped to develop your thinking and approach to learning and teaching?

APPENDIX C

Participant Post-Survey

This information was converted into a Qualtrics format to enable data collection and aggregation.

Date: _____

Each of the questions below will use a Likert-scale range including the following possible responses: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree

1. I understand what is meant by a home-centered, Seminary-supported Gospel learning approach.

2. As a Seminary teacher, I feel well-prepared to implement a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning and teaching approach.

3. I think that a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach is important for the success of Gospel learning
    a. within the Church.
    b. within Seminaries and Institutes.
    c. within the lives of my students.

4. I frequently consider how to encourage a home-centered, Seminary-supported learning approach
    a. during my lesson preparation
    b. when communicating with parents of my students
    c. when contacting my students' priesthood leaders
    d. when interacting with students regarding their personal, spiritual development

5. I feel comfortable evaluating the success of my efforts with facilitating a home-centered Gospel learning approach for my students and their families.

6. I think that I am helping my students and their families to be more successful with their home-centered Gospel learning.

7. I value collaboration with other Seminary teachers as an important mode of personal learning and development.

8. I feel comfortable participating in a collaborative discussion regarding learning and teaching with faculty members.

9. I think that experimenting with various methods and approaches in the classroom is an important part of learning how to better facilitate learner understanding.

10. I frequently collaborate with other Seminary teachers regarding how to improve my efforts with encouraging home-centered Gospel learning.

11. I think the faculty pod discussions were beneficial in developing my approach to better support home-centered Gospel learning.

12. I think the sharing of ideas in inservice meetings was beneficial in developing my approach to better support home-centered Gospel learning.

13. I think the inservice training was beneficial in developing my approach to better support home-centered Gospel learning.

Free-Response Questions

1. As a Seminary teacher, what would you say is your role in encouraging and facilitating a home-centered Gospel learning approach?

2. What methods do you most frequently utilize when encouraging a home-centered Gospel learning approach?

3. What methods of encouragement do you find are most helpful in encouraging a home-centered Gospel learning approach?

4. How do you evaluate your success with encouraging your students and their families to participate in a home-centered Gospel learning approach?

5. How has your involvement in collaborative discussions with faculty members changed throughout the semester?

6. To what degree do you think these collaborative learning experiences have helped to develop your thinking and approach to learning and teaching?

7. Do you want to be involved in collaborative discussions with faculty members in the future? Please explain beyond a simple "yes" or "no" answer.

APPENDIX D

Discussion Questions During Final Report

1. What helped you most to develop your thoughts and approaches with facilitating a home-centered, Seminary-supported Gospel learning approach?

2. What differences have you noticed as a result of this home-centered focus
   a. Within the classroom?
   b. In other interactions with parents and students?

3. What do you feel that teachers and students need to be more successful with integrating a home-centered, Seminary-supported Gospel learning approach?

4. What are some take-aways that you have learned from the communities of practice discussions?
   a. Did your involvement in these communities change over the semester? If so, in what ways?

5. What are some take-aways that you have learned from the design thinking process?

APPENDIX E

List of Home-Centered, Seminary-Supported Methods Suggested or Used by Study

Participants

Throughout the study, participants mentioned or used a variety of methods to support home-centered, Seminary-supported gospel learning. Below is a list of those methods, in no particular order.

- Invite the youth in a Seminary class to text their parents about a question (i.e., an experience they previously had with paying tithing or a family history story where an ancestor demonstrated faith in Christ). Later in the lesson, the teacher invites those who received a response to share those experiences.

- Create a class website where a small pre-class assignment is posted every day. For example, it might be a question that invites them to talk with their parents about a doctrine, scripture, or family history story or a video with a question to personally ponder or discuss with their family.

- Send an email to parents or guardians inviting them to share with their youth a time that an ancestor demonstrated great faith in following the Lord.

- During lesson preparation, consider the needs of specific students, rather than just thinking of them at-large.

- Add resources into class learning experiences that would help to support the CFM at-home curriculum but are not included in it.

- Communicate with parents or guardians (i.e., text, phone call, or email) about a student's positive behavior in class.

- Contact each parent or guardian to establish a connection with them and build greater understanding regarding the needs of their youth.

- As part of an overview of the chapters studied that week in the scriptures both in Seminary and CFM, give some examples of relevant problems that youth may be experiencing that could be answered through in-class and at-home studies.

- Send a newsletter or email with an overview of what will be studied in the Seminary class that week with a question that students would be invited to discuss with their parent or guardian.

- Assign youth to teach some of what they have learned from their CFM studies at home during the first few minutes of class.

- In class, model different ways that individuals and families might study CFM. During this, different groups of students can act as "families" to learn techniques and skills that they could then use at home.

- On Monday, provide youth with an opportunity to share what they learned during the previous week of study both at home and in their Church meetings.

- For a devotional thought to begin each class, assign a student to share what their parent or guardian's favorite scripture is and why they like it.

- Have a day where parents can come to Seminary, both to experience what it is like and to find out how teachers can better support their youth.

- Send an email home with a link to an online form where parents and guardians can share (either anonymously or with a name attached) what challenges their youth are facing and how a Seminary teacher might help.

- Ensure youth understand that the class requirement to study the scriptures can be met as they study their scriptures, in conjunction with CFM, daily with their family.

- Reference and discuss CFM more often in class.

- Share more experiences from personal and family scripture studies.

- Encourage youth to write down additional questions that they can take from Seminary to their homes or from their homes to Seminary.

- Pray for additional ideas of how to be more home-centered while teaching in a Seminary classroom.

- During lesson preparation, consider what the youth might be especially excited to learn about and what they may then want to share with their families.

- Communicate with parents or guardians when a concern arises in the Seminary classroom.

- Create an online repository where teachers can add and refer to ideas about how to effectively promote HCGL from within a Seminary classroom.

- Focus assigned devotional thoughts on topics or themes that come from CFM.

- Ask students regularly about experiences that they are having with the scriptures, the Spirit, and the Savior outside of the Seminary classroom.

- Emphasize principles and lessons from within the scriptures that illustrate the importance of pondering the scriptures to receive revelation.

- Keep parents and guardians informed of class discussions, especially students that likely have lingering questions or concerns.

- With in-class assignments, consistently remind and encourage students to talk with their parents or guardians about those things.

- When youth come and visit about personal concerns or challenges, consistently invite them to share those things with their parents or guardians.

- Assign each youth a selection of scripture that they are invited to prepare and teach in a lesson to their family. Invite them to then take that lesson home and have their parent or guardian sign their lesson plan once they have taught them those things.

- Teach and emphasize the importance of families in God's plan within the Seminary classroom.

- Consider and address the gaps that students may have after studying CFM in their homes.

- Help students and their families understand that gospel learning should not become separated from our normal everyday life. Rather, gospel conversations

should naturally occur on a regular basis and in a natural way, not just on Sundays and Mondays.

- Invite students and their families to study a specific portion of CFM in preparation for a future class period.

- Consistently encourage students in class to read the scriptures.

- Encourage parents to participate in daily scripture study with their youth.

- Look more closely at the CFM for Individuals and Families (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020b) manual during lesson preparation. If a Semiary teacher is aware of what is taught there, they can help to reemphasize principles that are taught there and show or reference media that is included there, with an invitation for the youth to teach or review those principles with their families.

- Provide three minutes for youth to study CFM at the beginning of class and then invite a few to share what they learned.

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PUBLICATIONS

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