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High School Educator Perspectives of a Professional Learning Community Implementation Initiative in a Minority School

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Abstract

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MA, Saint Joseph's University, 2015

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Researchers have shown that effective professional learning communities (PLCs) enhance the ability of educators to improve student outcomes at schools, including schools with a student body of more than 75% students of color. Educators and policy makers need to understand more about how educators in these school settings experience PLC work. The purposes of this basic qualitative study were to determine how educators in a school serving primarily students of color both described their experiences relating to implementation of PLCs, and how they identified opportunities or gaps in their current resources. Adult learning theories informed the initial conceptual framework; implementation fidelity was identified during the study as a needed element for the framework. Data were collected through semistructured interviews conducted online with seven high school educators in one location in the southern United States. Data were analyzed using a combination of a priori, open, and axial coding to support thematic analysis guided by Yin's five-step approach. Findings indicated that educators need to have experience with the PLC concept, feel supported, and have sufficient resources and time for participation. Collaboration is the most important resource that is needed, with face-to-face interaction seen as more effective than online forms of interaction. The COVID-19 pandemic and the switch to virtual participation were disruptive. The participating educators were disappointed in the lack of respect they felt they received as adult learners and identified concerns with the implementation of the PLC. The study's implications for positive social change include enhancing capacity for administrators and teachers to develop better PLCs that counter the challenges of low academic performance in U.S. schools serving mostly students of color.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, the late Mrs. Annabell Johnson Wright, who was there through my struggles, challenges, mistakes, and failures and encouraged me to persevere and accomplish my goals.

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There are not enough words to express the gratitude I have for my committee chair, Dr. Christina Dawson. She was always supportive and easy to talk to. I could not have asked for a better person to guide me in this journey.

I would also like to acknowledge my second committee member, Dr. Laurel Walsh, and my university research reviewer, Dr. Nicolae Nistor. Thank you both for your encouragement, insightful feedback, and tough questions.

I also want to recognize my sister Dorinda Galbreath, who always cheered me on and encouraged me when the tears fell in the midnight hour. I also want to appreciate my good friend Kevin Bradley, and Earnestine Gibson. And of course, I give praise to God, for through Him, all things are possible. In the words of Nelson Mandela, “It always seems impossible until it’s done.” I could not have done this without all of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

In the United States, minority schools are defined as schools with populations comprised of over 75% students of color (Gardner et al., 2019). Test scores indicate that students may require additional assistance to identify and overcome academic obstacles (NAEP, 2017). The issue that led to this study was the gap in practice surrounding the potential role professional learning communities (PLCs) could play in addressing the persistent achievement gap for such students, possibly increasing their success in minority schools. Academic leaders are increasingly seeking to implement PLCs in diverse environments across the United States. For this reason, gathering insights into educator perspectives about PLC implementation and participation could enhance teachers' ability to use this method to meet students' needs. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to determine how educators in a minority school described their experiences relating to the implementation of the PLC initiative, as well as what the educators identified as challenges and supports to implementation. The goal was to determine whether there were positive social change implications to reducing the disparities of education among minority students, increasing completion rates, and reducing the gap in academic performance using PLCs.

Chapter 1 consists of several sections including the background, statement of the problem, and the purpose of the study. I present the research questions (RQs), discuss the conceptual framework and nature of the study and define key terms. This chapter concludes with an examination of the assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

Cvencek et al. (2018) revealed that students often perform poorly in academic areas due to a range of social, cultural, and structural factors. For instance, because many come from low-income families, they often have limited access to educational resources and opportunities. As Legewie and Fagan (2019) revealed, PLCs can aid in bridging academic performance issues in minority schools. The method emphasizes educators working together in achieving a collective purpose of student learning. According to Guetterman et al. (2019), scholars have used the term *professional learning community* (*PLC*) when describing every imaginable group of individuals with an interest in education, such as a grade-level teaching team, a high school department, a school committee, or an entire school district, among others. However, in this study PLCs in minority high schools were the particular focus.

Through shared knowledge transfer, PLCs ensure that students learn through a culture of collaboration amongst educators. Collaboration enhances the school's learning environment, removes barriers to success, and shifts focus to results rather than processes (Park et al., 2018). Therefore, a PLC remains a promising ingredient for assisting minority students in their academic pursuits.

The school that was the focus of this study had a total minority enrollment of 99% at the time of the study; all of its students were identified as economically challenged. Although many researchers have explored educators' perspectives regarding PLCs (Dogan & Adams. 2018), very few have focused specifically on the perspectives of educators regarding the use of this method in minority schools. This study addressed that

gap through an examination of educators' perspectives regarding PLCs in minority schools.

Problem Statement

Across the United States, poor academic achievement has been associated with far-reaching negative consequences for students, including (a) the increased likelihood of special education placement, (b) low-paying jobs, (c) dropping out of school, and (d) limited postsecondary opportunities (Pianta & Walsh, 2014). The National Association of Education Progress (2017) reported that 9th grade literature in minority schools in the Southern United States did not reach the target of 64%. The same source reported that nonminority schools in the same areas achieved 75%, well above the 64% target. The association reported that scores were lower in reading compared to 2017 for lower-, middle-, and higher-performing students at Grades 4 and 8, except for the highest performers in Grade 4. The National Association of Education Progress also reported that 2019 reading scores were lower for White and Black students at Grade 4 and for all racial/ethnic groups except Asian/Pacific Islanders at Grade 8 compared to 2017 scores.

Other researchers have studied the application of PLCs to improve the academic performance of students in minority schools. Park et al. (2018) found a significant positive correlation between math achievement rates for Grade 11 students in minority schools and the existence of PLCs in those schools. Dogan and Adams (2018) reviewed 13 empirical international studies and analyzed the impacts of PLCs on both teachers and students. They offered specific and detailed examples of how PLCs influenced student performance and improved teacher practice. However, the authors did not find research

that documented educators' perspectives of PLC implementation and effectiveness. Other researchers have found evidence of the effectiveness of PLCs but have not explored educators' perspectives on their implementation. Hattie (2015), for instance, explored what is considered a model PLC and how it can be used effectively, demonstrating that it could assist with transformative teaching and improve educator influences on the learning experience. Similarly, Keay et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of PLC implementation and its effects on student learning and on teacher practice but did not investigate the experiences and perspectives of the educators involved in the implementation process. Still, several researchers have shown that the implementation of PLCs can improve educators' performance and students' learning outcomes in many settings, including learner-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered settings (Burns et al., 2018). PLCs can make it possible for educators in minority schools to work together toward the common goal of analyzing and improving their classroom practices (Prenger et al., 2018).

The challenges that need to be overcome and the supports that need to be put in place during PLC implementation could affect whether teachers believe PLCs are successful in addressing student performance issues. However, there has been a gap in practice around which of the differing implementations of PLCs influence educators' satisfaction and their PLCs' outcomes (Owen, 2015; Prenger et al., 2017). This gap in practice exists across the United States, including minority high schools in the Southern United States that have been identified as having ineffective PLC implementation initiatives. A staff member from the school selected for the study indicated that the

school's PLC participants did not feel well supported. Other teachers also stated that there was a lack of collaboration and that they had not been able to develop an effective PLC program. My goal in this study was to gain understanding of the experiences and perspectives of the school's educators concerning implementation of the PLC initiative.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to determine how educators in a minority school describe their experiences related to the implementation of the PLC initiative. This included what the educators identified as challenges to implementation, as well as what they identified as helpful supports. As faculty in minority school settings work to improve conditions that lead to poor academic achievement, it is important to understand more about successful implementations of the PLC initiative.

Research Questions

I explored educators' perspectives regarding the implementation of a PLC initiative to gain insights on what challenges and supports influenced the usefulness of this initiative. I was especially interested in identifying participants' perspectives on what supports were needed from the school's management. To shed light on how participating educators perceived PLCs, I sought to answer the following RQs:

RQ1. How do educators in a high school serving primarily minority students describe their experiences during the implementation of the PLC initiative in their schools?

RQ2. What do these educators identify as challenges to implementation?

RQ3. What do the educators identify as supports to implementation?

Conceptual Framework

For the conceptual framework for this study, I drew from several different bodies of literature. The first was the literature on PLCs. This method emerged as a new approach to the organization of teachers into a practice-based professional education initiative that focused on teachers as a group of professionals within a school (Solution Tree, n.d.). Turner et al. (2018) defined a PLC as a learning environment that aims to promote and sustain educator learning in the school community through collaboration and shared purpose in improving learning among students. According to Rosado (2019), teachers who participate in collaborative PLC practices are likely to improve the quality of classroom instruction; practices include (a) analysis of students' work, (b) use of feedback in instructional strategies, (c) discussion of student-centered educational practices, and (d) provision of feedback and observation of peers, among others. With standardized test scores playing such a key role in the evaluative process, classroom teachers are often accountable for student achievement. Therefore, building the capacity and effectiveness of teachers through effective PLCs is even more important because it may ultimately improve the success of students.

I also drew on Knowles's (1968) andragogy and adult learning theory. Knowles outlined various concepts of the adult learning process while distinguishing it from the learning styles of children. Knowles asserted that adult learning is goal- and relevancy-oriented. Thus, most adults do not like learning for the sake of memorization. He found that adults are internally motivated, self-directed, and always bring life experiences to the learning experience. Therefore, in this study, I concentrated on how to incorporate adult

learning theory into the implementation of effective PLCs, making learning more practical and goal oriented for learners. PLCs are intended to encourage collaboration and learning with peers and were designed to focus on elements of adult learning and how human behaviors can be changed. Human behavior is learned by observing and modeling others (Bandura, 1977). This theory is applicable to PLCs because a component of a PLC is people learning by observing and modeling peers. Vygotsky's theories of development capitalize on social interaction and group involvement as the main factor for cognitive development (Gouthro, 2019). The theory can be applied to adult learners in PLCs by encouraging social interactions based on diverse perspectives and unique focus areas. Wenger (1998) explained that community creates a setting where learners can engage social interaction and meaningful dialogues where diverse opinions can be aired. Learners listen and interpret situations based on their learning and experience. Consequently, learners become more informed because of what they learn or gather from the dialogues. I used elements of these two theories to develop the interview queries and initial codes for this study.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative research design with data collected from full-time educators in a school serving primarily minority students. The educators participated in semistructured, audio-recorded interviews on the videoconferencing platform Zoom. In my interviews with participating educators, I asked them to describe their experiences relating to the implementation of the PLC initiative. As part of their descriptions, I collected what the educators identified as challenges and supports to implementation, as

well as what they identified as helpful supports. I identified key experiences and perspectives of educators regarding PLCs through interviews. An exploratory design entails the investigation of a problem that has not been clearly defined (Guetterman et al., 2019). Therefore, by adopting this approach, I revealed the perspectives of educators regarding PLC implementation and participation. Nonetheless, given that an exploratory study is often not conclusive and leaves room for more analysis of the perspectives (Guetterman et al., 2019), as researcher I was able to change the study direction based on new revelation from newly acquired insights. I adopted an interpretative approach as I addressed questions such as what, why, and how concerning the perspectives of educators on PLCs (see Guetterman et al., 2019). Because the study involved gathering insights directly from the participants, its outcomes may be important in decision-making about the process of implementing PLCs.

I used interviews to elicit first-hand insights that could not be obtained from generalized public sources or other parties outside of minority schools. The interviews provided information regarding the perceived effectiveness of PLCs and whether they should be implemented or further improved to promote learning among minority students. The semistructured, audio-recorded interviews lasted up to 1 hour. I was not able to recruit the planned number of 10 participants due to unexpected limitations; I did not get any responses from educators in a second school. Several variables under investigation included educators' perspectives of PLCs, implementation of PLC initiatives in minority schools, challenges, and support, and benefits of implementing PLCs in minority schools.

Definitions

Minority schools: Institutions where at least 75% of the school population is made up of members from minority communities such as Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans (Gardner et al., 2014).

Professional learning community (PLC): A group of educators who meet regularly to share their expertise, work collaboratively, enhance their teaching skills, and enhance the academic performance of their students (Guetterman et al., 2019).

Fidelity of implementation: A term that refers to the degree to which teachers and other program providers implement programs as intended by the program developers (Dusenburg et al., 2003).

Assumptions

In this qualitative case study, I had two assumptions. I assumed that the participants were representative of educators at minority schools. I also assumed that participants gave truthful answers to all interview questions. To elicit truthful responses, I informed participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequence and that their identity and responses would be kept confidential. My final assumption was that school personnel would be supportive and provide necessary available data pertaining to PLCs in their school.

Scope and Delimitations

I explored the experiences and perspectives of educators on PLCs. I also investigated the benefits, challenges, and barriers to the successful implementation of PLCs. One delimitation of this study was its focus only on the perspectives of educators

on the impacts of PLC implementation on student academic performance. Including other perspectives may have produced other insights on the supports needed for effective PLC implementation. I included a question as to whether the PLC initiative should be scrapped or retained. I used these boundaries to ensure that the scope of the study effectively stayed within the goals, aims, and purpose of the study.

Limitations

Using a qualitative design may have limited the applicability of the research. A limitation of qualitative research is that the results are more variable than those of quantitative research (Mcleod, 2019). My initial plan to was to study high school educators' perspectives of PLC implementation in minority schools using five respondents from two schools. However, in one of the schools, no educators agreed to participate. My contact at the other school agreed to help me recruit more participants, and two more agreed to be in my study, so I had seven participants recruited from that school. Therefore, my study focus changed to understanding how educators in a minority school described their experiences related to the implementation of the PLC initiative and what the educators identified as challenges and supports to implementation, as well as what they identified as helpful supports. To elicit unbiased responses from the interviewees, I requested that they provide truthful details in every response.

The study may have had other limitations. Qualitative research, even with seven respondents, is labor-intensive and time-consuming (Noyes et al., 2019; Sherif, 2018). A small sample size may result in inconclusive findings (see Sherif, 2018). For this reason, qualitative designs do not lead to generalizability, and the perspectives shared in my

study cannot be generalized to the entire population of high school educators. Furthermore, a qualitative researcher may have insufficient time to produce reliable and verifiable results due to the time constraints involved in this type of research (Liao & Hitchcock, 2018). Other potential limitations of qualitative designs are that they can be of poor quality, resulting in misleading findings (Ospina et al., 2018) and do not involve an investigation of causality of the events under study (Haven & Van Grootel, 2019). My goal did not involve understanding causality or providing generalizability. I did provide details to support transferability. More details are provided in Chapter 4.

Significance

This study is of importance to the education sector because it provides insight into the implementation of a PLC from the perspectives of the educators in a school. As a result, it may assist school personnel serving primarily minority students. The study also provides information on educators' perspectives of PLCs, which may allow practitioners to improve the efficacy and teaching experiences of educators at minority schools. The principal beneficiaries of the study's findings might include diverse education stakeholders and policy makers who work on issues related to minority schools. Understanding educators' perspectives of the effective implementation of a PLC and possible strategies to counter the challenge of low academic performance in minority schools could create positive social change. By designing and implementing more meaningful PLCs, education leaders may be able to improve instruction and student learning outcomes.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I introduced the research problem and identified the need to understand the perspective of educators in minority schools as it pertains to successful implementation of PLCs. I also discussed the objective of this study, which was to examine the perspectives of educators serving minority students pertaining to PLC implementation within the schools. The chapter included the RQs for the study and overviews of the conceptual framework and nature of the study, including justification for the use of a basic qualitative study design. The potential implications for positive social change within local and professional contexts were also addressed.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature related to the problem and purpose of the study. As I discuss, to improve the academic performance and educational welfare of minority students through PLCs in schools, it is important for educators work in collaboration to create strategies with the potential of improving the academic progress of the minority students. In Chapter 3, I provide a detailed description of the research design and methodology.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The research problem examined was how the differing implementations of PLCs might influence educator satisfaction with the PLC and, potentially, student learning outcomes. The challenges educators have faced have led them to experience the implementation of PLCs differently, and their experiences with challenges and supports have possibly influenced their perspectives concerning the effectiveness of PLCs (Owen, 2015; Prenger et al., 2017). The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of educators in minority high schools pertaining to PLC implementation. The goal of this research was to understand the high school educators' experiences within PLCs and their perspectives of the challenges and support needed for effective implementation of PLCs. In this chapter, I review literature relevant to the research problem. I also review the literature search strategy and provide an overview of the study's conceptual framework.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review for this study includes a variety of resources to achieve saturation on the topic of PLCs. I used search terms such as *minority*, *fewer opportunities*, *poor academic performance*, *collaboration*, *minority graduates*, *professional learning communities,* and *underrepresentation* to conduct an advanced search within databases. Articles from peer-reviewed journals were identified using Emerald Insight, Academic Search Complete, Education Source, and Sage Journals databases. I searched for the literature with the aim of addressing the RQs for this study. I carefully read the sources that I found to ensure that they were relevant to implementing PLCs in minority schools.

While exploring the research related to best PLC practices, I learned about the importance of the fidelity of implementation theory. Fidelity of implementation theory is the commitment to follow all policies and procedures when delivering an intervention (Dusenburg et al., 2003). Any program implementation and evaluation should address fidelity of implementation issues. When looking at the fidelity of implementation, the central question should always be whether the program was delivered precisely as written and prescribed. This includes presenting lessons as outlined and using questions, homework, and other activities simultaneously and in the correct sequence (Corcoran, 2017). I will discuss the fidelity of implantation theory in greater detail in Chapter 5.

PLCs are comprised of a group of educators who meet regularly to share their expertise, work collaboratively, enhance their teaching skills, and enhance the academic performance of their students (Guetterman et al., 2019). Several scholars have attempted to understand the scope of PLCs in stimulating better academic performance. In their study, Admiraal et al. (2021) sought to explore the means of enhancing educators' teaching skills. Through a focus on secondary school teachers as participants, Admiraal et al. identified the PLC as an effective intervention incorporating collaboration, leadership, shared school vision, professional learning opportunities, and changes in a school organization. Similar findings were revealed in a study by Ajani (2019), who reported that PLCs are key in promoting teachers' interactions with their classrooms. Through several communication approaches, Ajani emphasized that the presence of PLCs

facilitates teachers' skills in the design of instructional materials, as there is shared knowledge.

Burns et al. (2018) demonstrated that collaborative leadership processes and data driven systems initiated through PLCs are associated with student achievement in mathematics. Such PLCs promote professional collaboration among teachers, thus producing better ways to enhance student learning and achievement. The authors indicated that teachers could share ideas about different ways to instigate math practices and contests. The results of this study are important because the researchers adopted a multiple-baseline design that involved participants (teachers and students) from different school levels. Carpenter and Munshower (2019) noted that, through PLCs, teachers could seek ideas from their colleagues in solving complex problems for student learning purposes. Also, Dogan and Adams (2018) stressed that having PLCs motivates teachers to spend more time with their students, which in turn means that they are inspired to engage in PLC discussions about the good performance of their students. Park et al. (2018) added that collective responsibility can help teachers in supporting students having difficulties with subjects such as mathematics.

Cheah et al. (2019) used a qualitative study design to explore how PLCs often foster the development of teachers while also facilitating positive teaching practices. Teachers enrolled in PLCs tend to demonstrate competency in their subjects compared to those not enrolled (Heggen et al., 2018). Just as Dogan and Adams (2018) reported, Heggen et al. (2018) stated that being in a PLC enhances teachers' commitments while at the same time empowering them to register positive results in classrooms. Similar

findings were revealed by Prenger et al. (2018) as the researchers described empowerment as the major benefit derived from PLCs. They noted that teachers who participate in PLCs show higher levels of satisfaction, skills, knowledge, and positive attitude to teaching, which then positively impacts student academic performance.

Lyten and Bazo (2019) were interested in understanding the roles of principals in implementing PLCs. Most principals they spoke to indicated that collaborative leadership is effective in the implementation of PLCs. Park et al. (2018) also indicated that support from the school administrators is key in the effective implementation of PLCs. Carpenter and Munshower (2019) showed that if PLCs are to be implemented effectively, teachers need to show a willingness for physical and intellectual interactions. Heggen et al. (2018) identified the need for multidisciplinary collaboration in the implementation of PLCs as each stakeholder in a school plays a significant role in determining students' academic performance. On the other hand, Antinluoma et al. (2018) revealed that PLCs can be implemented successfully through the adoption of mindfulness leadership practices. According to Prenger et al. (2018), PLCs could be effectively implemented when teachers show the willingness to be proactive and engage in collaborative teaching and learning activities.

Despite the numerous benefits accruing from the effective implementation of PLCs, there are barriers that are often cited in the research. Turner et al. (2018) reported that many PLCs fail due to a lack of norms, team goals, trust, communication, and essential learning outcomes. Antinluoma et al. (2018) identified inadequate access to timely data on which to base instructional decisions as the major challenge to effective

PLC implementation. Conversely, Guetterman et al. (2019) claimed that decisions for PLC implementation originated by administrators can hamper the initiative's effectiveness. Similarly, Prenger et al. (2018) asserted that the lack of teachers' ownership of the PLC process can be a large barrier to the program's effectiveness. In evaluating the effectiveness of PLC programs, Turner et al. (2018) revealed that a culture in which teachers tend to compete (vs. one emphasizing collaboration) is among the threats to the successful implementation of PLCs.

These studies have identified the benefits, processes, and barriers to the implementation of PLCs. However, they did not address the implementation of PLCs in minority schools that often record low performance compared to their majority counterparts. In this study, I focused on this gap and attempted to provide knowledge that may inform school management about effective implementation of PLCs.

Murakami and Kearney (2019) stated that minority high schools struggle with issues of discrimination and exclusion which impact both teachers and students. Thus, teachers may struggle with PLC implementation in minority schools because students and teachers can become distracted. Learners may participate in demonstrations during class time and, as a result, miss important teacher assignments. The authors pointed out that teachers who are supposed to be in charge may be distracted because of what is taking place in society around them. Both learners and teachers may feel the need to get involved in societal demonstrations. Eventually, that can impact PLCs negatively, since faculty members may not be available to fulfill their responsibilities.

Murakami et al. (2019) related that minority schools are subject to limited resources, thus negatively impacting implementation of PLCs. The authors asserted that PLCs cannot be implemented without sufficient resources. Principals need enough resources to support faculty members who make sacrifices to support student learning. For example, there are instances where teachers may work overtime to help students understand certain concepts, and they should be compensated effectively to motivate their performance. However, the lack of resources in minority schools to support such initiatives may interfere with PLCs. Additionally, classrooms and teaching materials may not be enough in some instances, which may ultimately affect learning. A PLC requires a substantial supply of learning materials that learners may use whenever teachers assist them (Murakami et al., 2019). Faculty members also may lose hope whenever they must negotiate shortages almost every day.

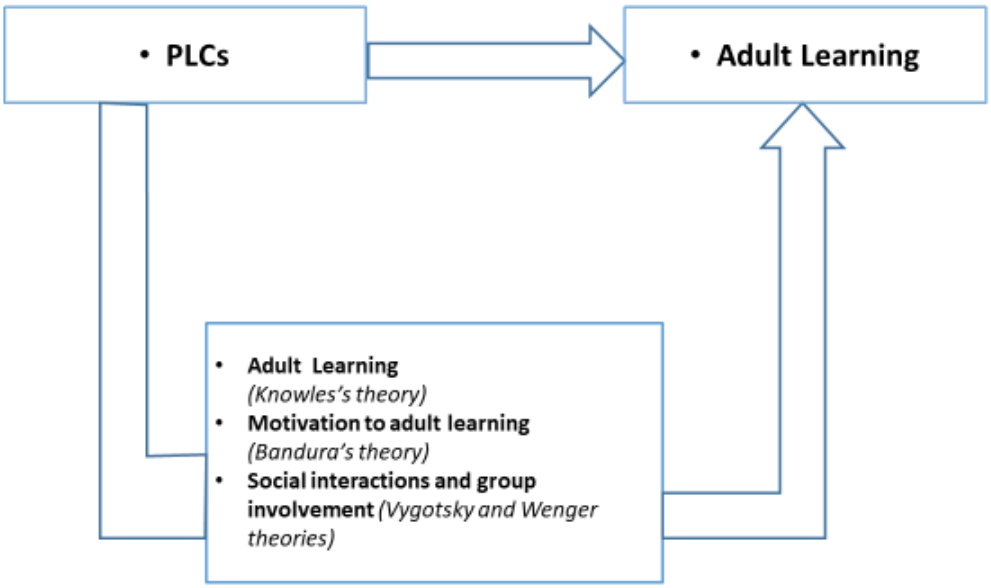
Conceptual Framework

The main conceptual lens for this study was Knowles's (1978) adult learning theory. It supplemented the research related to best practices in PLCs. In addition to these theories, I used the theories of Bandura (1977), Vygotsky (1978), and Wenger (1998) to shed light on how adults learn. Knowles (1978) advanced the concept of adult learning as distinct from that of children. However, the quality of learning is also key, as Bandura (1977) observed when discussing motivation to learn. Wenger (1998) and Vygotsky (1978) introduced the element of interaction between learners and educators when describing the social interaction and group factors influencing learning. The conceptual

framework shown in Figure 1 further illustrates the relationship between these three theories, PLCs, and adult learning.

Figure 1

Integrated Model of Conceptual Framework



Note. PLC = professional learning community.

The conceptual framework in Figure 1 emphasizes the influence of PLCs on the adult learning process. The two research phenomena assert a relationship mediated through variables introduced by the four associated theories discussed in the research. The approach to adult learning introduced by Knowles distinguishes the learning of adults from that of children. The Bandura theory advances the element of motivation key to maintaining and supporting the learning process for adults. The social interactions and group involvement discussed by the Vygotsky and Wenger theories further enhance the

learning process with PLCs embracing the three elements increasing their effectiveness in promoting learning in high schools for minority schools.

Knowles developed the adult learning theory in 1978. It outlines various concepts of the adult learning process while distinguishing it from the learning styles of children. The adult learning theory explores ways of making learning captivating and exciting to adults (Knowles, 1978). Educators who work with adults need to adjust their work to align more with Knowles' theory about adult learning. Applying the theory effectively includes creating an environment that encourages the learners to participate, collaborate, experiment, and use the knowledge gained promptly. In an enabling environment, the adults will feel empowered to grasp the new information.

Bandura's theory can be used in adult learning as a practical approach to improving learning quality. It applied to this study because it emphasizes increased cohesiveness in PLCs in minority schools as part of a social approach to learning (Bandura, 2019). The theory relates to motivation because it addresses encouraging people to embrace collaboration and to draw inspiration from others. Vygotsky's theory is relevant to this study as it capitalizes on social interaction and group involvement as the main factors for cognitive development (Gouthro, 2019). This approach can be applied to adult learners in PLCs by encouraging social interactions based on diverse perspectives and unique focus areas. It is linked to motivation because it encourages people to learn through improved cognitive development (McLeod, 2018). Wenger's theory, through the concept of communities of practice and in this study, is relevant to PLCs by improving interactions among individuals (Yarbrough, 2018). Motivation is

attained by the idea that the theory champions putting together people with common interests or goals. The universality of ideas and plans makes participants more willing to work in unison and improve the learning process.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

In this section, I explore the characteristics of the PLCs and the benefits that PLCs add to the students and the educators. The history of PLCs and their introduction into the learning environment will also be discussed. I also explore the impacts that PLCs have on students, the impact they have on the school settings, and the culture established. This section also addresses capacity building and pedagogy which are key elements in the learning process.

Professional Learning Communities

PLCs have been operationalized and conceptualized differently depending on school setting (Antinluoma et al., 2018). Antinluoma et al. (2018) defined a PLC as an inclusive group of people who are motivated by the vision of shared learning. As a result, they work together and support one another to find ways from the external and internal environment to find practices that promote the development of better approaches that enhance learning.

Brown et al. (2018) proposed another definition of PLCs. They viewed a PLC as any conceivable alliance of people that have a similar educational interest, such as a school district, high school department, school committee, or grade-level teaching team. Notably, the alliance should be committed to working collaboratively through an existing process to improve the achievement of the students. Therefore, a PLC should incorporate

collective learning and shared personal practices that require teachers to participate in activities such as classroom observations, peer coaching, and discussion that ultimately support their professional development.

Additionally, Vanblaere and Devos (2018) defined a PLC as a professional development environment within a collaborative work culture characterized by supportive interactions. The learning environment in PLCs is opposed to the traditional model of teacher development, which focuses on training. That training model has a limitation because it results in weak interactions between teachers. PLCs, instead, emphasize the benefits of teachers learning from each other at their workplaces (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). Teachers in PLCs strive to use the best possible teaching strategies to improve instruction and, ultimately, the performance of the students.

According to Turner et al. (2018), PLCs are learning environments that aim to promote and sustain educator learning in the school community through collaboration and shared purpose to improve learning among students. Particularly, PLCs can lead to the development of teacher culture and practices and promote learning among students.

The four definitions indicated there is no universally accepted definition of the concept of PLCs. However, from definitions proposed by Antinluoma et al. (2018), Brown et al. (2018), Turner et al. (2018), and Vanblaere and Devos (2018), it can be concluded that PLCs are teams of educators that focus on sharing ideas about their strategies to enhance their teaching practices. As a result, they facilitate the creation of a learning environment that enables the students to achieve optimum learning outcomes.

Notably, PLCs can be organized differently, such as by grade levels, by entire teaching staff, or by content areas.

Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

The definition of PLC shows that its primary goal is to improve teaching and learning. For the PLC to support teacher professional development, it has to incorporate specific traits. According to Schaap and de Bruijn (2018), PLCs draw upon a minimum of five elements. They include collaboration, derivatization of practices, clear and consistent focus, reflective dialogues, and shared values and norms. Schaap and de Bruijn (2018) found that there are seven distinct elements of PLCs. They include reflective dialogues; task perception; tensions; change in group composition; beliefs about alignment; and socialization where alignment, socialization, and ownership are critical. Notably, not all elements are recognizable in all PLCs. Additionally, Bates and Morgan (2018) described seven elements of PLCs. They include a focus on content, active learning, support for collaboration, incorporation of effective models of practice, an offer to coach and provide expert support, increased reliance on feedback and reflection, and sustained duration. The elements provided by Schaap and de Bruijn (2018) and Bates and Morgan (2018) are comparable, as they all point to collaborative learning among teachers to improve their teaching strategies.

Effective PLCs are designed to offer teachers and school heads opportunities for voluntary participation. In such a voluntary participatory learning environment, teachers are expected to dedicate themselves to learning within the PLC and intentionally use reflective dialogues for exchange in experiences (Schaap & de Bruijn, 2018). Similarly,

Vanblaere and Devos (2018) asserted that reflective dialogue in PLCs implies that teachers use in-depth and reflective conversations about educational issues such as student achievement, curriculum, and instruction.

The derivatization of practices refers to teachers sharing their teaching methods and allowing colleagues to enter their classrooms to learn from their teaching styles (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). The derivatization of practice is essential as it enhances the abilities to observe others' methods and practices. This approach combines with collective responsibility in making PLCs successful, which is sometimes considered shared norms (Vanblaere & Devos, 2018). Collective responsibility is a trait in PLCs where teachers agree to share their responsibility for student learning, improvement, and general operations as opposed to leaving the task to leadership teams. According to Antinluoma et al. (2018), there are two sets of PLC-guiding characteristics. The first is a set of organizational characteristics which include culture, leadership, and capacity building. The second is a set of operational characteristics which include continuous professional development, collection and use of information, and trust. Culture describes the character and function of the school and incorporates aspects such as social interactions, values, and norms, all of which can either positively or negatively affect a school.

Leadership describes the kind of support that school heads offer their teachers to sustain PLCs, while capacity enhances the implementation and sustainability of the learning environments from individuals, collective, and organizational dimensions Antinluoma et al. (2018). Continuous professional development describes the abilities of

the teachers to continuously gain knowledge on how they can improve their methods of instruction. The use of data implies that participants in PLCs can accurately and effectively implement new and improved learned teaching techniques. Trust constitutes a dominant trait for enhancing derivatization, reflective dialogue, and supporting collaboration.

Another characteristic of PLCs is teamwork among educators. Brown et al. (2018) provided five tenets that schools should consider when developing and implementing PLCs, all of which point to the importance of teamwork and collaboration. First, teachers need to work as a team and take responsibility for student learning as a group and not in isolation. Second, team members need to work together to develop a curriculum that meets the specific needs of each student. Third, teachers need to develop assessment measures collaboratively. The fourth and fifth tenets require members to use formative assessments to identify weak students and to use the data to create additional support for vulnerable students.

Benefits of Professional Learning Communities

A PLC's benefits are fundamental because of the numerous ways they enhance teaching and learning outcomes. According to Prenger et al. (2019), the implementation of PLCs is essential to strengthen continuous and sustainable improvement of schools, especially with the challenges of the ever more complex and fast-changing world. One benefit of PLCs is that they allow educators to enhance their professional development and, consequently, improve learning among students.

The PLCs allow teachers to share practices among themselves and thus facilitate the learning of innovative teaching strategies. PLCs are preferred and implemented for two reasons: to improve school performances and to enhance professional development (Schaap & de Bruijn, 2018). Similarly, Prenger et al. (2019) stated that PLCs promote satisfaction, improve acquisition of knowledge and skills, and support professional attitudes among participants, as well as encourage the application of acquired knowledge in teaching practice. These indicate the role of PLCs in promoting the professional development of teachers. However, Prenger et al. pointed out there is a need to understand how PLCs are challenging to implement and sustain.

With standardized test scores driving the evaluative process, classroom teachers are held responsible for student achievement. Therefore, building the capacity and effectiveness of teachers is essential to ultimately improve student success. According to Rosado (2019), teachers who participate in collaborative PLC practices like (a) analysis of students' work, (b) use of feedback in instructional strategies, (c) discussion of student-centered educational practices, and (d) provision of feedback and observation of peers are likely to improve the quality of their classroom instruction. The implementation of PLCs enhances the capacity of teachers to promote performance among students and general school performances.

Another benefit of well-implemented PLCs is that they facilitate the building of strong relationships between members. The focus of PLCs is a commitment toward student learning by working as a team to develop strategies that promote the development of positive outcomes. Teachers in PLCs share techniques and reflect on specific

interventions as a group. By learning to critically interrogate each other's practices, to collaborate and reflect on the growth and learning-oriented measures, and to consider their activities seriously, a community of practice emerges (Swanson et al., 2018). These aspects require trusting relationships and openness among members, which enhance their relationships, work experiences, and professional development. Healthy relationships are also promoted with increased collaboration in PLCs.

According to Antinluoma et al. (2018), a specific culture within a PLC may support collaboration, and a lack of trust in a PLC can lead to increased challenges in teaching and learning. Therefore, how a PLC is implemented, as well as how it ensures collaboration and whether it effectively contributes to teaching and learning, should be evaluated continuously. The reflective dialogues and shared vision in an effective PLC can enhance the development of strong relationships between teachers. Schaap and de Bruijn (2018) found that a lack of collaboration and reflective dialogue negatively affects professionalization and student learning outcomes.

When implemented well, PLCs can expose educators to up-to-date teaching strategies in class. PLCs support teachers to share their knowledge and learn from another continuously. The sharing of information by teachers can happen beyond a district and, thus, increase teachers' ability to acquire knowledge on emerging teaching strategies and new technological tools that ultimately promote student learning. According to Gilbert et al. (2018), the use of PLCs beyond a district increases confidence among educators by expanding their skills with new approaches, which can lead to sustainable PLCs. Additionally, the practice of learning from others allows educators to reflect on their

teaching strategies, as well as on ways they can incorporate their practice to promote teaching and learning. There is, thus, an increased chance that individuals will add value to their teaching practices.

The History of Professional Learning Communities

PLCs first emerged as a new approach to the organization of teachers into a practice-based professional education initiative that focused on teachers as a group of professionals within a school. In the 1960s, various researchers in the United States presented their ideas, suggesting PLCs rather than the isolation endemic commonly employed in the teaching profession at the time. By the late 1980s and 1990s, researchers solidified the concept of PLCs, and the study of a PLC as an academic intervention became more explicit.

Various studies have led to a better understanding of PLC implementation and the impact of PLCs on student learning outcomes. Rosenholtz (1989) conducted research on 78 schools in 1989. From her research, Rosenholtz established that in the institutions where learning is well developed, students establish collaborative learning. From the Rosenholtz (1989) study, it was therefore assumed that improvement in the teaching process occurs because of a collective initiative and not an individual enterprise.

Warren and McLaughlin (1993) conducted a study that concurred with Rosenholtz's study, advocating for strong professional communities. Because PLCs are assumed to have positive effects on teachers by providing collaborative opportunities, many studies have been conducted to explore the importance of implementation and to evaluate the effectiveness of PLC reform in various schools. The authors asserted that

PLCs should be teacher-led, but an administrative figure is still needed. Teachers unite to instigate student learning and achievement, but then the principal must still oversee everything. The principal is the important administrative figure who will ensure that everything is in place.

The PLC was developed after the standard-based learning failed to provide proficiency in public schools in America. The need to improve students' achievement led to the urge to reform the learning approach. In the report "A National at Risk" (1983), America-based researchers and stakeholders looked into the most efficient method of delivering educational abilities. The "National At-Risk" report recommended the adoption of measurable and rigorous principles to increase of student learning (Strike & Billman-Galuhn, 2019). With the widespread introduction of PLCs as the newest learning reform, they quickly gained momentum in various states. It is important to note that PLCs signify not only teacher sharing, but also the formation of a sharing culture, thereby achieving the goal of improving students' all-around performance.

The reform of PLCs has a core purpose of helping educational institutions to improve students' learning and to initiate active collaboration, allowing for an active dialogue between students and other stakeholders within the learning community (Hance, 2018). As a result, PLC reform aims to not leave any student behind while fostering learning skills. The community targeted by PLC reform included students, teachers, the principal, other staff members, and parents. These stakeholders as a result need to work communally toward the improvement of educational quality and learning in general.

The operation of PLCs has no principal standard which outlines how they should be implemented. However, institutions have adopted common elements when it comes to their implementation. According to Stoll et al. (2018), the common elements found in PLC implementation include a shared vision, mission, and goals. The members within a particular school need to work toward the improvement of their relationships, as well as learning. As a result, the schools focus not on teaching, but learning. Further, to ensure that the reform is effective, continuous monitoring of the achievements of the students ought to be conducted (Rodway & Farley-Ripple, 2020). Other essential elements also have been recommended by various authors in the implementation of PLCs. For instance, group norms may be initiated, a logic of collective education may be introduced, and data from the common assessment are used (Auslander et al., 2018; Hargreaves, 2019; Reyna, 2019).

Trust and Collaboration in Professional Learning Communities

Trust is an essential element that impacts the success of any organization. The concept of trust is pivotal in school settings, especially when providing instructions to students (Antinluoma et al., 2018). PLCs function as avenues that allow educators to work beyond their guidelines to build trust and a conducive environment that influences their students' learning ability. In most cases, it enables the children in minority schools to gain continuity in their success following the establishment of a collaborative environment (Antinluoma et al., 2018). Creating a collaborative environment allows students from minority schools to actively participate in classroom activities, contributing to their knowledge gain.

Through collaboration, schools foster an effective teaching practice that allows a high level of student understanding. According to Admiraal et al. (2021), each teacher's goal is to influence their students' learning through collaboration as schools transition from traditional formats into PLCs schools. In this case, trust is a significant phenomenon that aids in motivating students to work toward a common goal (Admiraal et al., 2021). Moreover, collaborations contribute to create successful relationships vital in establishing a successful school climate. Admiraal et al. (2021) asserted that a successful school climate impacts team building if members can resolve complex issues to create a path for continuous school improvement. Therefore, trust fuels collaboration, which is vital in team building and sharing ideas between teachers that can lead to school improvement.

Mahimuang (2019) outlined some traits of PLCs that are based on trust: (a) sharing ideas, (b) collaboration, (c) shared accountability, (d) open dialogue, and (e) monitoring students' progress. Therefore, the establishment of PLCs leads to creating trust, as PLCs are perceived as learning supports for the students. This impacts teachers' professional development and can ultimately improve students' success. Additionally, Sutarsih and Saud (2019) suggested that PLCs have been significant in contributing to teachers' professional development. Therefore, the creation of teacher-to-teacher trust leads to the establishment of PLCs that enhance positive instructional school climates (Sutarsih et al., 2019).

In addition, Kalkan (2016) indicated three elements that can help build successful instructional climate change using PLCs: (a) derivatization of the teaching methods, (b) collaboration, and (c) assessment based on the classroom level. The teaching method's

derivatization contributes to the build-up of trust among teachers following their appreciation of each other's levels of professional knowledge and development. In a study conducted by Gray and Summers (2015) on the professional development of the science and math teachers, collaboration and build-up of trust were challenging when sharing students' work since the PLCs followed the same pattern of support that the teachers received from the school leaders. Therefore, PLCs needed to focus more on trust-building to impact teachers' relationships positively (Gray & Summers, 2018).

Zhang et al. (2016) described a PLC's effectiveness as based on trust, focusing teachers on mutual values that initiate the PLC's goals and working collaboratively to ensure that all the students reach their potential. Moreover, several studies show that teachers' morale is boosted by the trust established in PLCs, which allows them to positively change their instructional environments and promote student learning and professional development (Hallam, Smith & Hite, 2019; Leifler, 2020; Lin et al., 2018; Mahimuang, 2019). In this case, teachers' collaboration and trust enable them to work as a team to impact their effectiveness and student achievement. Hallam et al. (2019) indicated that teachers who undertake their activities in an instructional climate based on shared leadership are likely to impact their PLCs' effectiveness. Hallam et al.'s study, focused on professional development in a rural district, found the teachers' leadership was pivotal in the PLC's effectiveness. Teachers benefited from leadership opportunities and collaboration, contributing to effective PLC meetings.

Principals' Role in Professional Learning Communities

Principals play an integral role in a PLC's establishment in school settings, making the educators rely on their support and leadership. According to Balyer (2018), the school principals initiate collaboration in school settings which increase the students' and teachers' learning process based on the PLC process. In this case, instructional leadership improves students' achievements. Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2019) suggested that principals aided in increasing diverse students' performance through their leadership practices, since quality school leadership contributes to student achievement. Therefore, it is important to consider the principals' role in PLCs when determining the potential success of PLCs to increase teachers' and students' achievement (Brwon, Horn, & King, 2018). In this case, school principals provided opportunities that enabled teachers to work collaboratively through self-managing teams that influenced students' achievement in minority schools.

Schaap and Bruijn (2018) asserted that school leaders' roles have evolved over the years, which explains schools looking for leaders who have collaborative attributes that can influence the integration of diverse personnel to improve the students' results. This reflects the fact that school principals have to determine the PLCs' effectiveness during implementation. Huijbloom et al. (2018) stated that school principals are vital in establishing a PLC's sustainability. Therefore, for PLCs to be more effective, school leaders need to use the best educational leadership practices to analyze students' data and the teaching practices involved in the PLCs. Several studies show that principals are critical pillars in support of PLCs when they create time for the scheduling of PLCs

through creative scheduling and protecting the collaboration time for teachers involved (Admiraal et al., 2021; Huijbloom et al., 2018; Prenger et al., 2018). In other words, schools benefit from PLCs based on the support their principals provide to the teachers by creating a conducive environment, which significantly impacts the teachers' career development.

Garcia and Weiss (2019) indicated that there is a need for principals to adopt a transformational leadership style when implementing PLCs. This contributes to facilitating changes that influence teachers to achieve more than expected of them in school settings. Trilaksono et al. (2019) showed that transformational leaders act as role models who initiate trust, especially among teachers, to ensure that teachers think as leaders. In this case, transformational leadership is pivotal in PLCs, since those leaders can portray confidence, competence, and successful communication of goals. This in turn encourages teachers to believe in goals, increases their confidence, and achieves the schools' overall goals.

Teachers' Role in Professional Learning Communities

PLCs are based on creating learning communities that include the teachers' concerns based on their learning and the students. According to Lin et al. (2018), the teachers' primary role in PLCs would be to focus on learning in classroom settings. In this case, commitments toward each student/s learning are vital in PLCs, and they rely on each other to ensure that they meet students' learning needs. Lin et al. (2018) found that teachers in high-functioning PLCs monitor students' learning and obtain data based on their progress to improve the learning process. According to Slack (2019), PLCs have

been significant in importing teachers' development, contributing to their achievements since the teachers can meet the diverse students' learning needs. However, educators must share teaching methods that significantly impact the students' learning gains (Slack, 2019).

Respect and trust among teachers in the PLC are vital for its success. Kareemee et al. (2019) asserted PLC members who exhibit trust and respect are likely to take risks, making them learn new practices to meet students' needs. According to Valckx et al. (2018), teachers must align their instruction to the curriculum to improve their pedagogy, enabling them to reach more diverse students, especially in minority schools. In this case, teachers align their assessments to meet curricular goals and objectives and work collaboratively in a PLC.

Othman et al. (2020) postulated teachers teaching their subjects effectively indicates they understand pedagogy in relation to their particular specialization areas. In this case, teachers who are proficient in their areas can employ a number of motivational methods, enabling them to reach a large number of diverse students. It makes PLCs a significant resource where experts can share their content with teachers, making the PLCs better (Wilson & Narasuman, 2020).

Impacts of Professional Learning Communities

Numerous impacts of PLCs have been discussed in research literature. I summarize them here.

Students' Achievement

The PLCs have been vital in enhancing students' learning gains through improvements in teaching practices. According to Dogan and Adams (2018), students' learning standards have contributed to the increase in academic expectations, which has forced educators to become premeditated in their teaching strategies. Schnaubert and Bodemer (2018) stated, "Interdependence is what organizations are all about. Productivity, performance, innovation result from joint action, not just individual efforts and behavior" (p. 3). This statement reinforces the significance of a team mindset when embracing PLCs in schools. It portrays the importance of the teams prioritizing the schools' mission and vision statements to meet diverse learners' needs. Schnaubert and Bodemer (2018) postulated that PLCs modeled and installed in specific subjects contribute to students' performance on standardized tests. Schnaubert and Bodemer found that the standardized tests' improvement emanated from the PLC, focusing on formative assessment interventions and teachers' practices.

According to Leifler (2020), learners are vital elements in the learning community. Thus, PLCs meet and foster their achievements. However, Leifler (2020) found that PLCs plan differentiation to meet students' learning gains, where the educators' ability to listen to the learners instills their confidence. In this case, teachers clarify different ideas that are not clear to students, which leads to addressing inconsistencies, especially in areas where they failed to impact students' success. However, PLCs have to be built around the school curriculum created by the Department of Education (Leifler, 2020). This prohibits teachers from designing their curriculum,

which impacts their achievements based on the classroom setting's context. In this case, PLCs use data to determine students' learning readiness and the most effective learning styles. Gilbert and Robert (2018) asserted that educators must take their time to ensure they know the students' names despite their learning ability, which minimizes bias in the learning settings and increases the student's performance.

On the other hand, Miller et al. (2019) postulated that PLCs increase pressure on educators, influencing them to meet all of students' needs, impacting their achievements. Miller et al. added that effective learning is based on ensuring teachers focus on student learning and not teaching content. Educators that focus on the teaching site and not student learning end up not learning the act of teaching. Therefore, teachers must implement effective strategies that influence teaching of diverse learners. According to Tinnell (2019), educators must focus on motivating learners, impacting their performance. Despite using all the learning strategies, educators cannot help students who do not believe they can transform their situation. Therefore, PLCs done properly have a significant impact on students' achievements. Gilbert and Robert (2018) noted that if educators allow learners to choose what they should study or whether they should study, most students will be left behind. Thus, educators must create a collaborative culture so PLCs provide support to learners so they can attain their learning goals. Gilbert and Robert (2018) asserted it is vital for educators to give students the power to choose, contributing to their motivation and learning engagement. School environments that provide the learners with minimal chances to make decisions and choices negatively affect their motivation (Gilbert & Robert, 2018).

School Improvements

School improvement has been attained by teachers using professional information when working with students, impacting their learning gains. Therefore, students' progress and students' achievements are highly associated with PLCs. According to Henderson and Corry (2020), improvements in teaching call for educators and instructional leaders to analyze students' performance by analyzing their data while reflecting on past teaching strategies and then implementing innovative practices to enhance students' achievements. This contributes to collective inquiry, which influences teaching innovations for PLCs. According to Henderson and Corry (2020), there is shared leadership in PLCs to promote staff engagement and collective inquiry based on the creation of shared values, vision, and different activities in the school settings. Wilson and Narasuman (2020) postulated PLCs act as the main drivers in transforming schools from isolation to collaborative cultures that influence students' achievements. In a qualitative study conducted by Henderson and Corry (2020) to determine the impacts of teamwork on school improvement, they found that a lack of collaboration and cooperation contributes to schools' poor performance. However, teachers benefited from the collaboration and planning through PLCs. Henderson and Corry (2020) stated through collaboration educators gain insights based on motivation, curriculum development, dealing with students with disabilities, and classroom management. This contributes to school improvements following students' learning gains.

According to Furqon et al. (2018), teachers are influenced to continue with the learning process and collaboration through PLCs based on their learning settings'

problems. In fact, PLCs enable teachers to establish learning strategies based on vision and values to impact school improvement since they are based on a solid foundation that entails shared vision and values (Dogan and Adams, 2018; Furqon et al., 2018; Valckx et al., 2018). Therefore, decisions made based on learning strategies aid in meeting the schools' visions. Furqon et al. (2018) stated collaborative vision creates a conducive learning environment that promotes unwavering commitment from key participants of the PLCS, influencing student learning and school achievement. Through collaborative vision, school systems can possess a culture of continuous improvement by cultivating strong PLCs (Furqon et al., 2018). Slack (2019) claimed school settings' PLC model propels the schools' visions by committing teachers to it and the instructional leader. In such situations, it is possible to determine schools' flaws and implement school improvement initiatives that contribute to students' improvements.

Thompson et al. (2019) postulated educational reform's major challenges have supported continuous improvements through instruction. This has influenced the implementation of school improvement initiatives in education where educators share different ideas that can affect students' learning gains. Thompson et al. (2019) found that school leaders tend to focus on compliance by concentrating on their improvement efforts based on how they are graded in the regional educational systems. One way that school leaders focus on compliance is through the No Child Left Behind Act. The law compelled educators to find time to improve students' learning skills (Thompson et al., 2019). The law was based on the assumption that students who become proficient in reading can perform well in other subjects.

Thompson et al. (2019) suggested an improvement in reading scores among students in the No Child Left Behind era, but those students did not perform well in other areas. It contributed to the idea students' improved achievement in one area may not affect students' learning in all areas since they have different learning abilities in various areas. However, Thompson et al. (2019) suggested it is necessary to provide appropriate equipment to influence teachers to plan and work collaboratively to create instructional programs. Consequently, it has significant impacts on students' achievement and overall school performance. Sunaengsih et al. (2019) suggested schools' physical layouts must be considered where different departments are within proximity to one another. This encourages mentoring and coaching through educators sharing their experiences, which supports the PLCs' conditions. Moreover, they stated there should be a wide range of communication devices, such as emails and telephone, which influence communication to promote collaboration (Sundanese et al., 2019).

Employing new modes of communication, it is possible to create the trusting relationship with administrators that is crucial in successful PLCs. Nurturing these relationships initiates professional conversations and reflective practices that contribute to students' achievements and school improvement. On the other hand, Tinnell et al. (2019) suggested that through collaborative inquiry, teachers are able to analyze what works well in one school, classroom, or district and implement it in another learning setting to impact students' learning and school improvement.

Capacity Building and Pedagogy

PLCs within schools contribute to creating team models that significantly impact collaboration but are based on the teachers sharing similar content. According to Orozco-Messana et al. (2020), teams set up in school settings should be based on creating achievable goals by individual members of the team interdependently. The members of PLCs may come from diverse groups, where conflict might arise. Therefore, it is necessary to create a culture within PLCs based on commitments and collaboration professionally as a team (Orozco-Messana et al., 2020). According to Gore et al. (2019), to create effective PLCs in school environments, school leaders need to structure PLC teams based on certain expectations. This contributes to creating functional PLCs that significantly impact most of the issues that arise in school settings. Gore et al. (2019) concluded that functional PLCs support educators in all school systems, fostering an environment of trust and constructive feedback that improves professionalism.

According to Mamlok-Naaman (2018), creating teacher PLCs is an effective way to introduce innovation and professional development. In school settings, the best way to develop PLCs that aid in professional capacity building is by creating teams that teach the same subject. It enables them to build on their profession as a group and create powerful partnerships that have significant impacts on their areas of expertise (Mamlok-Naaman, 2018). However, Valverde-Verrocoso and Garrido-Arroyo (2020) suggested actively engaging teachers in PLCs does not necessarily improve student learning and professional knowledge. Nonetheless, the concept of PLCs revolves around improving the learning standards of children.

According to Zhang et al. (2018), PLCs help ensure students understand the content taught in classroom settings allowing teachers to improve their professional practices by reflecting on some of the areas they need to improve to create success, which contributes to their commitment to student success. Through this commitment, they create a culture that fosters continuous success. According to Widodo and Allamnakhrah (2020), PLCs enhance stem teachers' commitments, impacting their collaborative and personal reflection of their teaching practices. Consequently, they enable educators working in PLCs to make relevant changes in their professional practice to ensure they meet the needs of diverse learners under their care (Widodo & Allamnakhrah, 2020). They contribute to creating a healthy relationship between teachers and students, increasing students' learning gains, especially in minority schools.

Othman et al. (2020) indicated PLCs play an integral role in enabling educators to gain insight from other teachers' instruction and teaching practices. This allows them to develop new partitions toward their teaching practices, improving students' learning and professional development. According to Gilbert and Robert (2018), teachers effective in their profession embark on creating a conducive environment that influences the active learning process. This embraces diversity and encourages students to become active in the learning process by designing lessons that influence their active participation.

Lin et al. (2018) suggested students' active participation provides them with equal access to learning and differentiated instruction, impacting effective classroom management. Tinnell et al. (2019) asserted that professional learning is based on creating an actual school setting that has the likelihood of imparting a higher degree of

professional growth. In this case, collaboration inquiry has become significant since it entails sharing ideas based on what works well in one school, classroom, or district and implementing it in another setting to enhance both students' learning and school improvement.

On the other hand, according to Sunaengsih (2019), learners benefit from teachers and instructional leaders who display commitment and share visions based on students learning to avoid disintegration in schools. In this case, teachers can improve their learning skills by building on their perusal capacity through collaboration while improvising student learning. Schaap and Bruijn (2018) outlined the skills they believe have a significant impact on student learning outcomes: (a) effective instruction in classroom settings, (b) creating a conducive learning environment, and (c) analyzing and adjusting the learning practices. Through these traits, educators can work collaboratively, minimizing teachers' isolation and maximizing the impact of sharing responsibility to enhance students' learning.

Professional Learning Communities as a Culture of Continuous Learning

According to Mahimuang (2019), collaborative culture has been a significant method for educators and instructional leaders to share information and practices that enhance students learning. PLCs have contributed to the shift of instructional leaders' and teachers' mindsets to create a culture based on improving teaching practices and content expertise (Leifler, 2020). Valckx et al. (2018) suggested school cultures based on lack of shared values and visions are likely to create an environment that does not support professional development, increasing teachers' and students' performance. Therefore, the

transformation of schools' cultures involves all members' inclusion to ensure they collaborate to develop different ideas that can significantly impact schools' productivity.

According to Widodo and Allamnakhrah (2020), the PLC culture is based on improving teachers' skills and instructional practices intended to impact students' learning gains. These practices are vital in collaborative school cultures following joint efforts of all the participants. According to Valverde-Verrocoso and Garrido-Arroyo (2020), distributed leadership has become pivotal in school settings, where school leaders have been promoting teacher ability to make rational decisions that enhance student learning. In this case, instructional leaders use teachers' leadership to influence students' learning environments while promoting professional development to create a culture of consistent school programs (Valverde-Verrocoso & Garrido-Arroyo, 2020).

Prenger et al. (2018) noted PLCs influence creating a positive school culture that enhances student learning, deliver high-quality instructional practices, promote collaboration among teachers, and build on teachers' capability. As a result, there is an increase in positive staff relations that leads to implementing a culture of continuous improvement. According to Wilson and Narasuman (2020), PLCs alleviate teachers' isolation, making them feel empowered to enhance student learning. They foster a collaborative culture where teachers can share students' academic achievements. In this case, they share content based on their expertise and encourage each other to take risks and try new approaches to teaching practices that support a lifelong learning environment. According to Schaap and Bruijn (2018), teaching practices enable teachers

to use evidence on students learning, which creates cultures of continuous improvements in school settings for both students and team members.

Summary and Conclusions

I presented themes in the literature review that reflect the benefits of PLCs and how effective implementation can foster academic improvement. Research about PLCs had not focused on understanding how educators in a minority school describe their experiences related to implementation of the PLC initiative. My study addressed this gap and included what educators identify as challenges and supports to implementation. In Chapter 2 the conceptual framework connected the theories of Knowles, Bandura, Vygotsky, and Wenger as they relate to PLCs with the potential of improving the academic progress of minority students. I also described the literature search strategy and the possibilities for positive social change within local and professional contexts, providing relevance for conducting the study. Chapter 3 will provide further details on the research design, methodology, and the connection between the apparent gap in literature and the rationale for the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to determine how educators in a school serving primarily minority students described their experiences relating to the implementation of the PLC initiative and what the educators identified as challenges and supports to implementation. I sought to understand the experiences of high school educators on PLCs and how they perceived supportive as well as challenging features. Key aspects of a qualitative research design include identifying the goal and rationale for the study; incorporating the conceptual framework; aligning the RQs, data collection, and data analysis; ensuring proper treatment of participants; and planning for validity and trustworthiness (Carl & Ravitch, 2016). In Chapter 3, I provide an overview of the research method, which includes the rationale of the study and a description of how the conceptual framework informed the development of the RQs and the research design. I also describe my role in the research process. Information about the participants, instrumentation, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures is also included in this chapter.

Research Design and Rationale

For this basic qualitative study, I used interview data to explore the perspectives of educators on both the supports and barriers to PLC implementation. Gathering data in this manner allowed participants to act as experts and describe their experiences in their own words. The goal of this study was to understand high school educators' experiences within PLCs, when they experienced a barrier or a support, and how that contributed to the PLCs implementation. According to Jilcha (2019), the design of a study provides a

framework for how information that is relevant to the underlying research will be obtained. Dudovskiy (2018) further defined a research design as the general plan of the researcher about strategies and methods of collecting and analyzing data in order to answer the RQ. An explorative design entails the investigation of a problem that has not been clearly defined. Therefore, by adopting this approach for this study, the perspectives of educators regarding PLCs were revealed.

I used an exploratory design to answer the RQs. According to Patnaik et al. (2019), that study design is effective in instances where the problem has not been solved. A review of related literature showed that PLCs have been effective in improving the overall performance of minority students (Dogan & Adams, 2018; Park et al., 2018). Although previous studies assessed the effectiveness of PLCs in improving student outcomes, little was known about the perspectives of the educators on its implementation. The lack of previous investigation of the research phenomenon made it feasible to use an exploratory design. The interview questions provided educators in a minority high school the opportunity to describe their experiences during the implementation of the PLC initiative in their schools. I wanted to understand better what these educators identified as barriers and supports to implementation.

The focus of this research design was to gain a better understanding of how high school educators perceived the implementation of PLCs. Novara et al. (2018) explained that the research process varies depending on the nature of the problem identified in exploratory studies. I identified 10 high school educators across two schools who were experienced in handling minority students. However, due to unanticipated limitations, I

was able to interview only seven participants from one school. I sought the expert opinions of the participants in this exploratory study based on Nattrass (2020), who observed that experts' insights help provide insights into the problem under study.

Nilsen et al. (2020) stated that there is no standard procedure for conducting exploratory studies. As a result, the design was unstructured and interactive. However, I did adopt an interpretative approach to answer *what*, *why*, and *how* questions concerning the educators' perspectives on PLCs (Guetterman et al., 2019). According to Orcan (2018), a common starting point for this design can be to answer the "what question." This entailed identifying the purpose of the research or study problem.

In my study, the RQs centered on the differences and similarities in educators' perspectives concerning the implementation of PLCs. Because I had participants from one school only, I decided not to compare the data across schools. Instead, I focused on the perceptions of the educators in one school concerning the challenges and supports during the implementation of PLCs.

To gather high school educators' perspectives, I conducted interviews lasting up to 1 hour with the selected participants. The interviews were semistructured. Unlike closed-ended instruments where participants must choose between options provided by the researcher, the use of semistructured questions allowed me to gain insight into areas that had not been included in the initial interview questions (Roulston, 2018). Adding open-ended interview questions provided insights into new areas of PLCs implementation that I had not previously considered. Therefore, by allowing participants to respond more freely about the implementation of PLCs, I gained necessary information concerning the

topic. Furthermore, given the limited information regarding educators' perspectives, conducting interviews helped me gain basic information about those perspective. This information not only allowed me to answer the research questions, but also to establish baseline information that can be used for future research on PLCs and other educational initiatives. Also, because the study involved gathering insights directly from educators, the research and its outcomes may inform educational leaders' decisions about the implementation of PLCs.

I chose the research design with limited information on the designs use in past research concerning the topic. An advantage of conducting interviews is that doing so helps the researcher to assess the value of the research at an early stage (Abutabenjeh & Jaradat, 2018). This means that by engaging the participants in interviews, I was able to assess this study's value and relevance as I conducted the research. Also, given that the design lacked a formal structure, I had the flexibility to adapt to changes in the research process as they occurred. Although I sought to explore the perspectives of high school educators on the implementation of PLCs, I was able to expand the study to include other issues that arose in the course of research.

There are some limitations to using an exploratory design. Tobi and Kampen (2018) indicated that even though explorative designs can be modified, results obtained from such studies are often inconclusive. Because of the lack of relevant theory concerning the topic, I found it difficult to verify the study findings. As Hallingberg et al. (2018) noted, the lack of literature and theory to support the findings can make it difficult

for researchers to draw valid conclusions. The lack of conclusive results leaves room for more analysis in future studies on the implementation of PLCs.

Because research on the perspectives of educators on the implementation of PLCs in minority schools remained scant, I sought to provide information concerning the topic without drawing conclusions. By the end of this study, I had established a strong foundation toward understanding their perspectives. The exploratory design was crucial to identify the factors important for analysis in this study. In assessing the perspectives of high school educators, this sample did not adequately represent the target population. As a result, findings obtained cannot be generalized to all high school educators in the United States.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher for this study, I was the exclusive instrument used to collect data throughout the research process. I developed interview questions; conducted interviews; and collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data to develop the study's findings. I had no prior personal or professional relationships with any of the participants for this study. Yin (2018) stated that researchers often choose to explore a topic based on personal experiences or knowledge of a problem and warned that case studies should not be used to validate a preconceived stance. I did not consider my point of view as I developed the study's conclusions. Because qualitative researchers focus on conveying the reasons why people feel and act as they do (Asper & Corte, 2019), I focused on examining such behavioral attributes of educators. In this regard, I asked questions that were relevant to understanding their perspectives on the implementation of PLCs. Prior to

each interview, I explained to participants my role as a researcher, which included assuring them I did not have any direct and indirect influence over them.

As the researcher, I interpreted participants' responses by listening to them, observing their facial expressions, and observing their tone to gain additional insight into their perspectives of PLCs. During the interviews, if any participant responded in a way that I strongly agreed or disagreed with, I engaged in neutral feedback and expression. I recorded mental notes if any of the responses made me feel validated, annoyed, or anxious while collecting data, as suggested by Ahrens (1999). As emphasized by Aspers and Corte (2019), I considered the data in relation to my experiences as I conducted my thematic analysis, as well as in relation to protecting the participants. As part of that, I developed the ethical aspects related to disclosure, informed consent, respect, trust, and social responsibility (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Žukauskas et al., 2018).

Methodology

I conducted a basic qualitative study to investigate a minority high school in the Southern United States, where approximately 96% of the student population is African American. For the purpose of the study, minority schools are institutions where at least 75% of the school population is made up of members from minority communities such as Blacks, Hispanics, and Native Americans (Gardner et al., 2014). The school studied was identified as having an ineffective PLC implementation program. Procedures for participant recruitment and selection, along with interview and data analysis protocols are described.

Participant Selection

In this study, I examined the perspectives of high school educators regarding the implementation of PLC initiative in a minority high school. To identify key experiences from the participants' viewpoints, I used the purposive sampling technique in conjunction with snowball sampling in selecting potential participants. The sample size of 10 for the semistructured interview was selected based on the recommendations of Vasileiou et al. (2018), who indicated that saturation should guide the determination of the appropriate sample size. Therefore, I determined that 10 semistructured interviews would be sufficient to saturate data in the current study.

The semistructured Zoom interviews were essential in gathering data that helped answer the questions. Using purposive sampling, I selected individuals who met some properties essential to the study (see Ames et al., 2019). When identifying participants, the first criterion considered was whether the potential participants worked in minority-dominated schools. This technique enabled me to identify 10 participants who met the qualifications of being teachers who were experienced in handling minority-dominated school environments. In addition, selected participants had to be educators who had experience dealing with PLCs that spanned an extended period. The interview response rate needed to surpass 50%. However, no educators from school two volunteered to participated for the study, which limited my data collection and analysis.

After the selection of the sample, I informed the participants of their role in the study and their rights and obligations. For instance, I explained to the participants that they could decline taking part in the study, leave the interview process midway, and

consent to taking part in the data-gathering process by filling the consent form (Žukauskas et al., 2018). After that, the data collection process encompassed scheduling the day for the administration of the semistructured Zoom interviews. The interviews lasted up to 1 hour. The concepts under investigation included educators' perspectives of PLCs, implementation of PLC initiatives, challenges to implementing PLCs, and benefits of implementing PLCs. The interview responses were recorded on the phone app called Otter.ai that helped transcribe the interviews. The interview responses were stored in my laptop and encrypted to ensure that only I had access to the data.

I referred to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines on ethical procedures and made sure they were followed. Further, to enhance the confidentiality and privacy of the participants' particulars details, I approached the documentation and analysis of results using anonymous labeling of the respondents' identities, TG1, & TG2, for example, to ensure confidentiality as I reported the data.

Instrumentation

The data were collected using semistructured Zoom interviews. As such, certain procedures were applied to ensure that the sample was transferable, convincing evidence, as well as corroborating the results via triangulation as emphasized by Noble and Heale (2019). The use of interviews helped in getting first-hand insights that could not be obtained from generalized public sources or other parties outside of minority schools. In this regard, interviews with educators were able to provide information about the degree of effectiveness of PLCs and whether they should be implemented or further improved to promote learning among minority students. According to Mohajan (2018), the primary

instrument in a qualitative inquiry is the researcher because the researcher's unique characteristics could influence empirical materials' collection.

As Mohajan (2018) explained, instrumentation encompasses the tools or means that researchers employ while attempting to measure variables in the process of data gathering. In this regard, instrumentation denotes to design, selection, assessment, construction, and conditionalities of administering the designated instruments. As such, instrumentation was critical in enhancing the current study's internal validity. Thus, in the current inquiry, I played a central role in collecting the opinions and ideas of educators regarding PLCs by employing the interpretive philosophy. Semi-structured interviews were used as instruments to collect specific data from respondents about their perspectives on PLCs among minority-dominated high schools. The interview queries were tested and developed by presenting the possible queries and protocol to some of my colleagues. The process helped to clarify the wording of the questions and to better estimate the amount of time that would be needed in the interview process.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The initial recruitment of participants occurred through referrals. The participant contacts with whom I had previous interactions received a letter requesting them to refer four educators who could participate in the study. The personal communication participants were possible participants based on their teaching experience and their history teaching minority students. The personal communication participants were also sent the contact information for all the referrals. The educators referred from both schools received emails notifying them about the significance of the study and its purpose,

allowing them to become partners in the research (Wilkins et al., 2019). They also received an email of a consent letter, which they signed digitally based on instructions and emailed back before an interview was confirmed. The participants needed to sign a consent form indicating that they understood and agreed with the research's guidelines and implications (Curran et al., 2019; Nyanchoka et al., 2019). The participants received instructions regarding the study and what they could expect during the day of the study.

Data collection involved the use of audio-recorded interviews with the participants. I scheduled Zoom conversations with them so I could record as we talked. I also used Otter.ai as a transcription tool. AI with Zoom provided interactive transcripts in real time and post meeting. The use of teleconferencing for this research was necessary considering the current social distancing restrictions put in place due to COVID-19 (Dodds & Hess, 2020). The use of interviews was an effective approach because it allowed the collection of more reliable data directly from the participants (Fritz & Vandermause, 2018). Spitzer and Weber (2019) observed that reported data is prone to bias due to multiple alterations by individuals who record the data over time. Once the participants were selected to participate in interviews, each interview lasted up to 1 hour.

- An email was sent to the potential educators to participate in the study, through the personal connections I have at the school. Once the other seven participants from the school had been identified and agreed to participate in the study, I emailed them from the information provide to me through the personal communication from the schools.

- Emails were sent to the educators participating in the study to choose dates to conduct the interviews.
- Interviews were conducted over 8 weeks. The interviews were audio-recorded interviews, lasting one hour each.
- The educators were emailed the interview protocol before the interview to allow them to develop their responses and seek any clarification regarding the process.
- Audiotaped interviews were transcribed after each session.
- I followed up with participants about interview responses and after the completion of interviews.

Recruitment emails were sent to the personal communication of both schools within one day of receiving IRB approval from Walden University (#08-24-21-0622966). The email message contained an overview of the study's problem and purpose, my professional and personal contact information, and the consent form. Participants were given 4 weeks to respond to the recruitment email to participate in the study. After the 4 weeks had passed without my receiving any responses from the second personal communication contact, I sent a follow-up email to that individual. A second follow-up email was sent to encourage the identification of potential participants. After two additional follow-up emails across the next 2 months, I did not obtain any responses and no further contact was made with the second school's personnel. Therefore, the study became focused on understanding how educators in one school serving primarily students of color described their experiences relating to the implementation of the PLC initiative,

what the educators identified as challenges and supports to implementation, as well as what they identified as helpful supports. The first personal communication was able to obtain two more participants to participate in the study, which gave me seven volunteers for the study.

Data Analysis Plan

The data analysis plan presents a discussion of how I analyzed the qualitative data using Yin's 5-step approach. Yin (2018) suggested that the best way to achieve breadth and scholarship when in qualitative research is to identify the question of inquiry, build propositions, identify the unit of analysis, link data to propositions and interpret the findings from the study. The before mentioned five elements are consistent with the 5-step approach to data analysis, which include compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding.

Compile

During the data compilation stage, I gathered the data from the interviewees. I audio-recorded the participants' responses and made notes on a form that had spaces for all interview questions. Due attention was paid to the respondents' non-verbal communication cues while noting my thoughts about the data gathering process. The collection of data was followed by transcription, which involved transforming the audio data into text to allow for qualitative data analysis. I read the transcripts repeatedly to internalize the content of the data. Crossman (2021) emphasized that listening to the audio recordings and reading the transcripts repeatedly improved researcher's

understanding of the data sets. After making sense of the qualitative data, I began highlighting the content based on the emergent patterns using different colors.

Disassemble

The disassembling stage involved breaking down the data into smaller parts depending on the ideas participants communicated. Using the different color shades on the transcripts, I disintegrated data sets based on the similarity of the ideas presented. I generated codes using axial coding to construct linkages between data sets. Coding permitted me to organize the data and facilitate examination of relationship between codes (Adu, 2019). I repeatedly read the transcripts to avoid leaving out important information that helped in response analysis. I intended to use NVivo to organize the data before subjecting it to manual analysis. Following Swygart-Hobaugh's (2019) observation, I used Excel to help me organize the text data, code the text, manipulate the data set, and display the codes.

Reassemble

I started reassembling the data into groups based on categories to form coherent data sets to improve the meaningfulness of the qualitative data. The need for reassembling in qualitative data analysis is to create categories from codes that were generated during the disassembling stage and use the categories to create themes (Cassell & Bishop, 2019). I internalized the codes that were generated from the qualitative data. Internalization enabled me to understand the patterns in data and compare their relevance to the purpose of my study. I merged codes that communicated similar ideas to create categories. This condensed the data into a manageable size. I further internalized the

categories and merged those that communicated similar ideas to generate fewer, manageable emergent themes. Based on the argument by Swygart-Hobaugh (2019), I used this process to facilitate coding the data and extracting themes from the collected set of qualitative data. The themes I generated from the categories provided the basis of data analysis using the thematic analysis technique. Similar to disassembling, reassembling exhibits a cyclical process. Therefore, it was necessary to check repeatedly the categories while referring to the themes and the qualitative data set to ascertain the accuracy of the analysis process and to establish varied explanations and meanings.

Interpret

Interpretation of the findings involved checking the attributes, completeness, validity, and empirical accuracy of the narrative written using the themes and supported by categories, codes, and the actual responses from the study (Ballesteros & Mata-Benito, 2018). When presenting the findings, I checked if the findings met the qualitative data criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I repeatedly checked the data backward from themes to categories to codes and finally to the data set to ensure that I presented the findings accurately. Consistent with assertion by Cassell and Bishop (2019), I used direct quotes from the responses and noted all non-verbal communication cues and observable behaviors that participants displayed to support the interpretation of the results. Furthermore, I referred to previous studies to determine if the findings from my study confirmed or failed to confirm findings from previous studies.

Conclude

I used the interpreted data to draw conclusions about the phenomenon being investigated. When drawing conclusions, I connected all parts of the stages of the study, including the background, objectives, literature review, methodology and the findings (Ballesteros & Mata-Benito, 2018). Repeated review of the interpretations that I made about the data enabled me to ensure that I identified and explained consistencies and inconsistencies in the data and previous findings. The conclusions provided a basis for answering the RQs, making recommendations, stating implications for positive social change, identifying limitations, and suggesting areas for further research.

Trustworthiness

The current research aimed to significantly contribute to the literature on PLC implementation, making it vital to strive for legitimate understanding by other researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and the public. To enhance legitimacy, the current study's findings were grounded in trustworthiness. As Korstjens and Moser (2018) noted, trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry persuades researchers that their findings have caught the attention of readers. Forero et al. (2018) contended that there is a criterion that ensures trustworthiness by enhancing the findings' rigor. These criteria include aspects such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Credibility

I ensured credibility through direct communication with participants regarding the intent and purpose of my investigation. To ensure engagement, I spent more extended

engagement periods with the participants (prior to the interview) to enhance familiarity with the PLC context as well as settings. This strategy ensured the data collected would not misinform, would build trust with prospective participants, and would clarify the data (Forero et al., 2018).

Dependability

In addition, I ensured there was dependability by embracing transparency in describing the research steps (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). These steps included all the contextual aspects of the research path, including the steps involved in the research project's commencement to the ultimate step of drawing inferences.

Confirmability

For this study, I served as the primary research instrument. Confirmability reflects the degree that findings are consistent and can be repeated (Connelly, 2016). I used an audit trail, detailing the process of data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation. I kept the research process clear, transparent, and streamlined so the research findings were based on the participants' narratives and words rather than potential researcher bias.

Transferability

I followed a written protocol for the solicitation, collection, and organization of data to be as transparent as possible with the processes used and the data collected (Bazeley, 2013). I had certain requirements for the educator participants. They must have established working in a PLC environment in a minority high school for at least a year or longer. I described both the behavior, experiences, and contexts of the participants to

ensure that analyzed behavioral and experiences can be meaningful (Forero et al., 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Procedures

Ensuring the confidentiality and privacy of the participants, as well as beneficence will be observed in this study (Goodwin et al., 2019; Žukauskas et al., 2018). The protection of human participants in research was critically important to me. Several critically important aspects of research ethics include the IRB, ethics committees, informed consent, assent, research relationships and boundaries, transparency, and confidentiality (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A cover letter describing the nature of the study, confidentially issues, ability to withdraw from the study at any time, along with my contact information was provided to each interview recipient. All those agreeing to participate in the study were asked to electronically sign a consent form that addressed these issues. All the personal information obtained will be kept confidential and in a secure location that only I can access. No participant names have been or will be identified. I ensured that all information gathered from participants was gained confidentially, and I reassured all participants about their privacy.

I sent a cover letter to participants describing the nature of the study, confidentially issues, and explained each participant's ability to withdraw from the study at any time, along with my contact information. The interview protocol included a script to introduce myself, and a script at the end of the interview to acknowledge and thank my participants for their time to assist me in my research. After all data are published and five years have elapsed, the paper copies of the interview notes will be shredded and

destroyed, and all electronic data will be deleted from the password-protected computer and any flash drives that contain data from the study.

Summary

This chapter included an explanation of the selection criteria for the basic qualitative design and described other potential research approaches that were not selected. Because interviews were the main data source, a basic qualitative investigation revealed perspectives of educators in a minority high school pertaining to PLC implementation. In addition, I included an overview of the participant selection, ethical considerations, and the role of the researcher, data collection, data analysis, and ways to address trustworthiness. I also offered strategies to enhance trustworthiness, which included descriptions to evaluate and establish a credible, reliable, dependable, and transferable study. In addition to ensuring a trustworthy study, a researcher must also guarantee an ethical study. Procedures for ethics approval were described specific to Walden University. Chapter 4 encompasses a description of the setting, each phase of data collection, the data analysis process, and I offer the results of this study in relation to the core constructs of the conceptual lens.

Chapter 4: Results

In this chapter, I present the findings and analysis. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the perceptions of educators in a high school serving primarily students of color and to describe their experiences relating to the implementation of the PLC initiative. I also explored what the participating educators identified as challenges and supports to implementation, as well as what they identified as helpful supports. Using a basic qualitative design, I collected data from seven participants. From the data, I developed categories and themes that could increase understanding concerning perspectives of educators in a minority high school pertaining to PLC implementation. I developed the following RQs using elements of the conceptual framework:

RQ1. How do educators in high schools serving primarily students of color describe their experiences during the implementation of the PLC initiative in their school?

RQ2. What do these educators identify as challenges to implementation?

RQ3. What do the educators identify as supports to implementation?

In the following sections, I describe the setting, data collection, and data analysis. I explain the results in relation to each RQ and detail the strategies I used to establish trustworthiness.

Setting

The setting for this study was a high school in the Southern United States. The student poverty rate is 100%. The school population is 91% Black, 4% Hispanic, 3% two

or more races, 2% White, 1% native Americans or other Pacific Islanders, and 1% Native American. This school is far below the state average in key measures of college and career readiness. The student to teacher ratio is 9:1, and more than three fourths of the educators have 3 or more years of teaching experience.

Participants

Participants were required to be educators who had specifically dealt with minority students and who had experiences of dealing with PLCs for an extended period. Of the seven potential participants contacted from the first school, all responded with interest and remained as participants throughout the study. None of the invited participants from the second school responded, and eventually my committee agreed that I could continue with the seven participants from the one school.

The educators who participated in the study had varied knowledge and experience levels, including their number of years as educators. I asked participants a general question that prompted them to discuss their years of experience. The range of years serving as educators was 5 to 25. All seven participants were high school educators, with one of the seven being an assistant principal; the other six were teachers. Six educators were female, and one was male. Table 1 shows a summary of participant characteristics. To avoid providing data that could potentially identify the participants, the table includes only the participants' sex and years of experience. .

Table 1

Selected Demographics of Participants

Participant	Sex	Experience (years)
P01	Female	5
P02	Female	5
P03	Female	10
P04	Male	15
P05	Female	16
P06	Female	20
P07	Female	25

Data Collection

I undertook data collection began after obtaining final IRB approval from Walden University (approval no. 08-24-21-0622966). Following the guidelines of Walden University's IRB, I first sent invitations to my personal contacts at both schools asking them to participate and to recommend other potential participants. I contacted the referred individuals via email and provided them with general information of the study, including possible risks and benefits. Interested individuals expressed their intent to participate by replying to the email. Responses were sent to thank participants for volunteering and to set tentative meeting dates. Follow-up communication through email occurred to confirm logistics of the interviews. Again, no one from the second school responded, even after 2 months of follow-up. For this reason, I focused on the experiences and perceptions of the participants at one high school.

Individual Semistructured Interviews

I designed the research study to examine the perceptions of high school educators in a school serving primarily students of color as they described their experiences relating

to the implementation of the PLC initiative. That included what they identified as challenges and supports to implementation. I conducted semistructured interviews on Zoom to gather data. The make-up of the interviews allowed for a conversational environment, which encouraged participants to speak openly and honestly. I developed an interview protocol (see Appendix) to provide a guide to extrapolate detailed information from the participants. The interview questions included probes to prompt for more information or to gain clarity when responses were vague. The interview protocol was developed to include conversational and general questions prior to asking specific questions relating to the RQs. The organization of the interview responses by interview question allowed me to categorize and make sense of the individual participant responses in the context of each of my RQs.

Location, Frequency, and Duration of Semistructured Interviews

I conducted one-on-one, semistructured interviews at a time requested by the seven participants. The interview processes took place over 2 months, from September 2021 through November 2021. I allotted 60 minutes for each interview. All the interviews took less time than allotted. I emailed follow up questions later.

Once an interview meeting began, I reviewed the purpose of the research and explained informed consent. I explained the procedures I was using to maintain participant privacy during the study. They included assigning a pseudonym, removing personal information, redacting specific names of people or entities, securing handwritten notes and transcripts in a locked personal file in my home, and maintaining audio

recordings in a password-protected file. Time was allotted for questions and a chance for individuals to decline participation with no consequence.

Methods to Record Data

I recorded all interview data using Otter.ai voice recording application, and because the technology created a transcript, I was able to provide participants with my undivided attention. Although I took limited notes during the process, after each interview, I reviewed the transcript and focused on participant responses to each question. While interviewing the participants, I listened intently to the interviewees and provided them with my attention.

After downloading the audio file, I used the Otter.ai tool to transcribe the audio file. The transcripts were saved in the same password-protected folder as the audio recordings. Recordings and notes were transcribed immediately following each interview, to acquire an initial sense of the data gathered. The organization of the interview responses by interview question allowed me to categorize and make sense of the individual educator responses in the context of each of my RQs. I transcribed all audio recordings by November 2021. There were no unusual circumstances in collecting the data.

Data Analysis

I describe the process of analyzing the transcripts, the cycles of coding, theme development, and results in this section. I used Yin's (2018) five-step approach to analyze participant data. The steps included compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding. During the analysis process, I followed Yin's procedures for

data analysis and coding as I transitioned from one coding cycle to another. Yin suggested that the best way to achieve breadth and scholarship when in qualitative research is to identify the question of inquiry, build propositions, identify the unit of analysis, link data to propositions and interpret the findings from the study.

During the data compilation stage, immediately after each interview I read the transcripts repeatedly to internalize the content of the data. Crossman (2021) emphasized that listening to the audio recordings and reading the transcripts repeatedly improves researchers' understanding of their data sets. After making sense of the qualitative data, I began highlighting the content based on the emergent patterns using different colors.

I generated codes using axial coding to construct linkages between data sets. Coding permitted me to organize the data and facilitate examination of relationship between codes (Adu, 2019). Following Swygart-Hobaugh's (2019) observation, I used the Otter.ai tool to transcribe the audio file, organize the text data, code the text, manipulate the data set, and display the codes. The emerging codes were then organized according to their relationships with one another, which presented emerging themes.

Codes, Categories, and Themes

The opening coding phase involved reading the qualitative text data to break it into smaller pieces of discrete data, as Vollstedt and Rezat (2019) recommended. I initially highlighted the smaller pieces of data in the text while engaging with the transcripts. The purpose of breaking the text into smaller pieces by highlighting meaningful phrases is to allow continuous comparison and contrast of patterns, events, and relationships in the data (Yaghi, 2018). Subsequently, the highlighted smaller pieces

of discrete data were combined to generate initial codes. Excerpts from the interview transcripts supported each code. Table 2 highlights some of the initial codes generated in the open coding phase.

Table 2

Examples of Initial Codes Generated From Open Coding

Interview question	Initial code	Excerpt from the transcript
What is the implementation process of your PLC at your school?	Training at the district level Head of department meetings and staff PLC Virtual PLC during the pandemic	"…the district put in training folk to train us…." "…we also do like a staff PLC…." "…we've been utilizing the virtual option…."
What do you identify as challenges and barriers to the process?	Lack of fidelity and commitment Teachers' unwillingness to analyze data Lack of common strategies Problem with technology COVID-19 impact	"…they don't want to analyze data." "…everybody believes their ways." "…sometimes technology is an issue."
What support or collaboration are provided to you?	No specific support Providing information Teachers' cooperation	"…there's not much admin support…." "…channeling down the required district processing…."
What are the accommodations to remove the barriers?	Departmental meetings Little or no accommodations	"…it's done within a department. It's never a school-wide…." "It's just not possible. Because we're a small school…."

Note. PLC = professional learning community.

Axial coding was the second phase of the data analysis process once the text data has been broken into discrete parts (see Bulawa, 2014). The phase enabled me to draw connections and patterns between the initial codes generated in the previous stage, as suggested by Scott and Medaugh (2017). Accordingly, I read the initial codes and the underlying evidence from the transcripts to establish how to group related codes into specific categories. Whittles (2017) explained that conducting actual coding helps generate categories with cleaned-up sets of supporting codes. After grouping the codes into the various categories, I described each category and supported it with evidence using excerpts from the data transcripts. The categories led to themes that are relevant to the RQs. Accordingly, the descriptions of each theme are presented in the subsequent sections.

Fidelity to Best Practices in Professional Learning Community Implementation

Having experienced educators as the research participants was instrumental in ensuring they possessed adequate knowledge in the study topic for in-depth information. Most of the participants identified issues with how the model and topics for the PLCs were chosen and implementation. Rather than being school personnel driven, the district administration drove the PLC work. Participant 1 stated, “the district decides or determines the process for the PLC, and the secondary coordinates.″ The participant added, “within our district, we have [an] instructional board… they decided they would bring into PLCs."

These excerpts indicated that the implementation process started from the district level through instructional boards, while school administrators coordinate it among their

respective teachers. According to the participants, the district conducted surveys using Microsoft forms to ask teachers what they were interested in to help design the program before rolling it out to the schools.

Further evidence indicated that the district instructional boards trained the teachers on PLC during the implementation process to enable its implementation at the school level. Participant 1 stated, “They gave the assistant principals a little more training," while Participant 2 indicated, “The district put in training folk to train us," and Participant 3 said, "We also do like a staff PLC."

According to Participant 1, sometimes the district trained a lead person in each school, such as the assistant principal, who would proceed to train the rest of the staff. Meanwhile, Participant 2 identified that the district dispatched a team to train teachers on the PLC. The third excerpt showed the next step at the school level, where the staff may hold meetings to discuss and analyze their role in PLC and the implementation process. The latter response bore similarity to Participant 1’s response, where one lead staff member got advanced training and disseminated the information to the rest of the staff.

The study further revealed that some challenges emerged due to the PLC implementation strategies being applied. Illustrations include those from Participant 3, who stated, “Another challenge is implementing some instructional strategies," and Participant 5, who said, “Everybody believes their ways.” Finally, Participant 6 indicated, “Members within the PLC do not share authority and decision-making by getting suggestions from all teachers and trying new strategies."

Participant 3's response implied that the implementation strategies were unclear or imprecise enough for the teachers to follow. The lack of a standardized strategy also may have contributed to such a problem, as shown by Participant 5's response. Besides, most of the participants reported that the implementation strategies varied due to different interpretations of the instructions. In addition, Participant 6's comment also pointed to a lack of adequate consultations to incorporate the educators' views when making critical decisions regarding the strategies.

Teacher Time and Commitment Challenges

Participants identified challenges due to teacher workload and competing priorities. These barriers led to either a real or a perceived lack of commitment for PLC involvement. Teachers seemed overwhelmed with responsibilities, as illustrated in these excerpts. Participant 3 indicated, "They don't want to meet; they don't want to have collaborative conversations." Participant 7 stated, "They don't want to analyze data."

Participant 3's response indicated that teachers lack the motivation and commitment to meet and have consultative conversations regarding PLC implementation. A similar trend was seen in Participant 7's response referring to educators who found it difficult to commit to the implementation process, which involved analyzing data. Accordingly, almost all the participants reported commitment challenges for the educators to implement PLC according to the program's requirements.

Some educators failed to fully adhere to the PLC initiative because they had overwhelming responsibilities in their regular teaching schedules. Participant 6 said, "Being tasked with so many extraneous activities, PLC implementation just becomes one

more.” According to the excerpt, educators already undertook many responsibilities at their places of work so that they have less time for the PLC initiative. Accordingly, most participants also reported finding it tiresome to engage in data analysis associated with PLCs after undertaking their usual teaching duties.

Lack of Administrative Support and Wish for More Collaboration

Most participants reported that they received no specific support to help them adequately implement the PLC initiative. Some of the excerpts are discussed here. Participant 4 stated, “It is just not possible. Because we're a small school… certain things are generic and are going on, but none of that is particularly useful in a collaborative sense." According to Participant 4, they did not receive the necessary support because they were a small school with no teachers sharing overlapping classes. The excerpt further revealed that the educators tended to follow generic procedures that did not help achieve the PLC goals. Participant 1 stated, “There's not much admin support." Participant 3 stated, “Channeling down the required district processing."

The study further revealed that educators receive minimal support from their respective administrations, as Participant 1’s comment indicated. Such lack of administrative support implied that once the teachers received instructions from the district teams, they were left to execute the rest of the implementation plans without further guidance or material support. Meanwhile, most of the participants reported that the only support they received was the means of channeling down the required district processing, as indicated by Participant 3’s comment. This point connects to the implementation process where the district team disseminated the information to the

respective schools through the school administrators, who would subsequently channel the information to their staff. Since the educators had previous experiences within PLCs, they wished for more support and collaboration as they had experienced elsewhere.

Decreased Teacher Engagement Due to Shift to Virtual Meetings

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant adjustments to the PLC implementation strategies. One of the most notable adjustments was the movement restriction which prompted PLC meetings to be done virtually using TEAMs or Zoom applications. Some of the transcript excerpts are highlighted here. Participant 2 stated, "We've been utilizing the virtual option." Participant 3 stated, “The challenges of doing things online… Being back in the building is much better than online." These two excerpts indicate some of the comments when the participants were asked to describe their experience with PLC during the pandemic. Almost all participants reported that the PLC physical meetings could not happen during the COVID-19 pandemic because of the authorities’ social lockdowns and other movement restrictions. As a result, virtual meetings replaced physical meetings. However, the teachers also reported that online meetings were not as effective as physical meetings since they had numerous disadvantages. Some of the disadvantages of the online meetings are highlighted in these excerpts: Participant 1 shared, “Sometimes technology is an issue.” Participant 5 said, “It is always better to have human interaction; it allows for reading body language and tone.” Participant 4 stated, “We are more relaxed when meeting in person. Knowing that a meeting is recorded tends to put a damper on open communication."

As Participant 1's comment indicates, some educators found it difficult to use technology to maximize online meetings effectively. As a result, they found physical meetings more helpful in achieving the program's objectives. In addition, some participants also cited distractions such as family matters when attending the meetings virtually. In addition, as Participant 4's comment indicated, the educators did not share their thoughts freely in virtual meetings as they may have felt uneasy about the meeting being recorded, among other distractions. This latter comment implied that physical meetings enabled the implementation team to generate more ideas by more active participation from the educators. Table 3 shows the inductive pathways from codes to themes.

Table 3

Pathways From Codes to Categories to Themes

Code	Category	Theme
Training at the district level	Top-down control of PLC	Fidelity to best practices in PLC implementation
Head of department meetings and staff PLC	Implementation process	
Lack of fidelity and commitment		
Virtual PLC during the pandemic		
Teachers' unwillingness to analyze data	Educators-linked barriers	Teacher time and commitment challenges
Lack of common strategies	Barriers linked to implementation strategies	
Problems with technology		
No specific support	Internal support in schools	Lack of administrative support and wish for more collaboration
Providing information via trainer of trainers model	External support	
Teachers' cooperation and buy-in		
Shift from physical to virtual meetings	Changes to PLC implementation schedules due to COVID-19	Decreased teacher engagement due to shift to virtual meetings
Distractions during online meetings	Impacts of the changes	
Problems with the use of technology		

Note. PLC = professional learning community.

Results

The findings of this study were based on the perceptions of educators in a school serving primarily students of color. They described their experiences relating to the implementation of the PLC initiative, including what educators identified as challenges and supports to implementation and helpful supports. I conducted the research to investigate the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of high school educators regarding their perspective of the implementation initiative. Overall, I found several minor themes during the data analysis stage. I combined the minor themes to create one overarching theme for each RQ. The overarching themes that emerged were (a) fidelity to best practices in PLC implementation, (b) teacher time and commitment challenges, (c) lack of administrative support and wish for more collaboration, and (d) the shift to virtual meetings decreased teacher engagement in PLC. The themes that emerged are presented in Table 3. There were some overlapping themes across the RQs.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness

The current research aimed to significantly contribute to the body of knowledge on PLC implementation, thus making it vital to strive for legitimate understanding by other researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and the public. To enhance legitimacy, the current study's findings were grounded on trustworthiness. As Korstjens and Moser (2018) noted, trustworthiness in a qualitative inquiry persuades researchers that their findings have caught the attention of readers. These criteria include aspects such as credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I

also conducted member checks by allowing participants to verify their transcripts. Additionally, prior to finalizing themes I once again analyzed each participants' transcripts for one final review. Finally, I initiated a peer review by having a colleague review the transcripts, coding, and themes to confirm the alignment of the transcripts and coding to the identified themes for this study.

Credibility

I addressed credibility through direct communication with participants regarding the intent and purpose of my investigation. To ensure engagement, I spent extended periods with the participants prior to the interviews to enhance familiarity with the PLC context and settings. These actions-built trust with participants and allowed me to understand the data more fully (Forero et al., 2018).

Dependability

In addition, I ensured that there was dependability by embracing transparency in describing the research steps (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). These steps included all the contextual aspects of the research path, including the steps involved in the research project's commencement to the ultimate step of drawing inferences. The convergence validated the dependability among themes and the process of allowing all participants to verify their transcripts. Furthermore, dependability was established by describing the research design and rationale, methodology, procedures for recruitment, and the data collection process.

Confirmability

I served as a key instrument. Confirmability reflects the degree that findings are consistent and can be repeated (Connelly, 2016). I used an audit trail, which is the act of the researcher details the process of the data collection, data analysis, and interpretation of the data. To keep the research process clear, transparent, and streamlined, the research findings are based on the participants' narratives and words rather than potential researcher bias. Transparency was presented in the study by sharing the findings after a thorough and methodical analysis process.

Transferability

I followed a written protocol for the solicitation, collection, and organization of data to be as transparent as possible with the processes used and the data collected (Bazeley, 2013). I had certain requirements that the educator participants had to have, including working in a PLC environment in a minority high school for at least a year or longer. I described the behavior, experiences, and contexts of the participants to ensure the analysis was meaningful (Forero et al., 2018; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This basic qualitative study collected significant details that can allow readers to determine whether they have conditions that can make this research valuable to their schools. The results of this study engender suggestions for further research.

Summary

In this chapter, I described the setting for data collection and described in detail the steps taken during data collection. The data analysis process and the steps taken to code participant responses accurately were also explained in detail. In conclusion, I

explained the results of the study and addressed evidence of trustworthiness. This basic qualitative study examined the perspectives of educators in a minority high school pertaining to PLC implementation. The data collection method for this study was semi-structured Zoom interviews with seven educators. An in-depth analysis of participants' responses was used to answer the RQs. Data were analyzed using Yin's 5-step approach to analyze participant data. Using Yin's 5-step approach resulted in four themes, (a) fidelity to best practices in PLC implementation, (b) teacher time and commitment challenges, (c) lack of administrative support and wish for more collaboration, and (d) shift to virtual meetings decreased teacher engagement in PLC

All the research participants agreed that PLCs are beneficial to the professional growth of educators when supports are intertwined with collaboration with other educators. All the educators who participated in this study indicated that PLCs were beneficial to some degree when supportive collaboration is practiced. Unfortunately, a lot of the experiences of the participants in this particular PLC implementation did not match their expectations. Their expectations were based on previous experiences and were aligned with the elements of the conceptual framework and the recommendations for supporting adult learning. Bandura's and Vygotsky's emphases on the social aspects of adult learning and the related motivation due to collaboration and drawing inspiration from others were in most descriptions from the participants lacking or limited. Since the district level administrators drove the PLCs, the decision-making aspects and ownership of the participants became constrained. While the teachers indicated they appreciated the interactions during live conversations based around the PLC, they did not feel engaged

and committed to participating in the specifics of the PLC. They were committed to improving student learning and wished for more time for their own learning.

The ideal elements of PLC work informed through Wenger's theory and his descriptions of communities of practice—improving interactions among individuals and putting together people with common interests or goals seemed to be shortchanged due to the barriers and constraints the teachers experienced. The universality of ideas and plans that could have made them more willing to work in unison and improve the learning process got lost in the overwhelming loads of work and the lack of choice given to the teachers within the PLC implementation. In Chapter 5, I will address the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications, and conclusion of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate educators' perceptions in a school serving primarily students of color. This included describing their experiences related to the implementation of the PLC initiative, what they identified as challenges and supports to implementation, and what they identified as helpful supports. I used a basic qualitative study approach. I conducted individual, semistructured interviews on Zoom with seven high school educators to explore their perceptions of support and challenges toward the PLC implementation initiative practices at their school. In this chapter, I interpret the findings for each RQs in relation to the conceptual framework. I discuss the limitations of the study, offer recommendations for further research, and consider the study's implications for positive social change. The conceptual framework included elements of adult learning theory from Knowles (1978), with supplemental ideas from Bandura (1977), Vygotsky (1978), and Wenger (1998), and the literature on best practices in PLCs. Three RQs were used to examine educators' perceptions of challenges and support concerning the PLC implementation initiative. They were

RQ1. How do educators in high schools serving primarily students of color describe their experiences during the implementation of the PLC initiative in their schools?

RQ2. What do these educators identify as challenges to implementation?

RQ3. What do the educators identify as supports to implementation?

I asked participants questions regarding factors that enabled or act as barriers to implementing change within their PLC programs. The questions were designed to

extrapolate data regarding educators' perceptions of supports and challenges of the PLC implementation initiative. Key findings that emerged from educators' responses indicated that for change to occur and for an effective PLC implementation initiative program to be sustained, leaders need to address four key issues. These are (a) fidelity to best practices in PLC implementation, (b) teacher time and commitment challenges, (c) lack of administrative support and wish for more collaboration, and (d) decreased teacher engagement in the PLC due to the shift to virtual meetings. These key findings align with the study's conceptual framework with the emphasis on fidelity of implementation within the best practices elements, but the perception of challenges and supports of the PLC implementation imitative varied for each participant.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings confirmed that educators' perceptions of the supports and challenges of PLC implementation are critical components of its effectiveness. Findings from this study, as reflected in the literature, suggested that PLCs work by making sure the adults work and learn together to find the best way to enhance professional growth. Successful PLCs can change practices and improve the learning climate for all – educators and students.

I developed the RQs to explore educators' perceptions of challenges and supports of the implementation process of the PLC. My interpretations of the study's findings were grounded in the connections within the conceptual framework and previous research, as described in the literature review. In the following section, I describe each theme that emerged when interpreting the study's findings.

Fidelity to Best Practices in Professional Learning Community Implementation

The study established that the key stakeholders in PLC implementation are district education administrators, school administrations, teachers, and students. This finding points to a top-down approach to the PLC implementation where the district education administrators make the fundamental decisions on what tasks and activities need to be executed. Then, they pass such information to the teachers through the respective school administrations. Students benefit from the educators' newly acquired ideas of teaching practice through the program. Stoll et al. (2018) noted that PLCs involve a shared vision, mission, and goals between the regional education coordinators, teachers, and students. Hance (2018) highlighted that the main PLC stakeholders include the principal, teachers, students, parents, and other school staff members. However, in the current study, participants did not mention any role of the parents in PLC implementation. Rodway and Farley-Ripple (2020) concluded that a PLC has a broad scope and may include a variety of stakeholders, as its implementation approaches also vary from one authority to another. Even so, the evidence places educators and students as the key beneficiaries of the PLC program.

My study revealed that the key decision-makers at the district level designed the PLC and rolled out training programs to the teachers. In most instances, a school representative was trained and directed to train the rest of the staff. This finding may imply that it is more practical and cost-effective to enhance capacity building through transferring knowledge from one person to another. Once a representative from a school is trained, they can train their staff colleagues. Balyer (2018) established that PLCs are

based on instructional learning, where the principal receives the training and disseminates information to the rest of the staff. In this case, the principal acts as the school representative by attending the necessary training and passing down the information to the teacher, who subsequently transfers the knowledge to students.

Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2019) noted that through the principals, the PLCs' capacity-building programs are brought to their respective schools to avoid wasting time and the high cost of implementation. However, in the current study, some participants decried the ineffectiveness of such training programs and suggested the need to have experts from the district organize direct training events with the teachers. Huijbloom et al. (2018) commented that the success of PLC implementation through school principals depended on the school heads having exemplary leadership skills. The findings point to the need for more inclusive implementation strategies that do not target only the school principals for the initial training.

Teacher Time and Commitment Challenge

Due to multiple factors, some teachers in the study stated that they had failed to undertake the PLC tasks and activities consistently because of competing responsibilities at school. Such a revelation points to a clash between the PLC initiative and the educators' daily teaching program. The educators prioritized their normal teaching activities before undertaking the PLC tasks, since the latter were not mandatory curriculum requirements. Prenger et al. (2018) described that educators' lack of ownership of the PLC process while focusing more on their daily teaching activities was a significant barrier to the initiative's implementation. Meanwhile, Turner et al. (2018)

concluded that educators tended to compete to achieve their teaching goals, thereby failing to participate in vital PLC collaborations. Therefore, these findings suggest more practical ways of incorporating the PLC program into the teachers' schedule to avoid divided attention.

I found that barriers to a successful PLC implementation included educator participation and investment. Some teachers showed a lack of commitment by either failing to attend the PLC training or not completing the required tasks such as data analysis. This outcome may have resulted from the lack of implementation measures to ensure all educators undertook the capacity-building initiative. At the same time, it also showed a lack of incentive by the educators to improve their skills through the PLC program. Admiraal et al. (2021) found similar findings regarding the difference in adherence to the PLC initiative by various teachers. In the latter study, female participants were more motivated to participate in the program than male counterparts. However, in the current study I did not make gender comparisons due to the small sample size and the need to maintain confidentiality. Lin et al. (2018) established that despite the educators' pivotal role in transferring the knowledge and skills acquired through PLCs to the students, some educators show a lack of commitment to the program as they preferred sticking to their traditional responsibilities. A lack of time and energy commitment by some of the educators emerged as one of the important barriers to successful PLC implementation.

There were also barriers linked to the strategies or approaches the PLC implementation team used to roll out the program. According to the participants, there

was a lack of uniformity in the strategies. This uniformity gap may have resulted from different interpretations by the trainers since the district educational administrators did not offer direct training programs. The varying interpretations were also a result of the complexity of the program content according to the participants' responses.

The lack of a standardized approach to the PLC implementation could also explain the uniformity gap. Rodway and Farley-Ripple (2020) also noted a lack of uniformity of strategies to implement across the schools as every principal tended to adopt unique approaches that suited their staffs. Meanwhile, Prenger et al. (2018) linked the different approaches in PLC implementation schools to varying interpretations of the PLC instructions by principals and their staff. Such differences made achieving the program's goals challenging since the results are not easily comparable.

Lack of Administration Support and Wish for More Collaboration

According to the participants, the only support they received regarding PLC was the means to disseminate the required district information. This finding was also evident in the PLC program's implementation process, where the district administrators disseminated information to schools through representatives and other applicable means. However, the educators were left to continue with the program without further support from the school administration or district coordinators. The present study revealed that the PLC program enabled educators to collaborate at the staff level and brainstorm how to improve their teaching practice.

Similarly, Antinluoma et al. (2018) highlighted that the program had enabled educators to work beyond their standard guidelines to build trust and a friendly

environment among themselves, thereby significantly adding value to the students' learning ability. It enabled them to continuously meet and discuss various tasks and activities to improve their skills and teaching practices. The evidence suggested that the program provided valuable support in skills improvement and integration among the educators. Admiraal et al. (2021) affirmed that PLCs have facilitated team building and purposeful collaborations among the educators, enabling students in the minority schools to gain continuity for improved learning outcomes. This study's findings concurred with the evidence from that previous literature that the PLC program has been beneficial in collaborations that enhance educators' abilities and skills.

The participants in the current study stated that they received little material support from the district or their school administrations. Participants indicated that the district and school administrations only provided the teachers with the materials containing the instructions but failed to follow up for any support necessary to achieve the program's objectives. Educators revealed that they only followed generic procedures which added little value to their daily experiences and skills. Prenger et al. (2017) observed that apart from the training given to the principals and disseminated to them, teachers did not obtain any direct support from their respective regional PLC coordinators. The kind of collaborations available after the initial training was done at the school staff or departmental levels. Bates and Morgan (2018) listed support for expert collaborations and effective models of practice as some of the most significant characteristics of PLC. However, the available evidence pointed to a lack of adequate follow-up programs after the initial training to ensure the teachers adhered to the PLC

initiative's tasks and activities. Such shortcomings of the implementation process made it challenging to achieve the PLC goals.

Decreased Teacher Engagement Due to Shift to Virtual Meetings

According to the study findings, COVID-19 has been one of the most significant setbacks to the PLC initiative implementation since 2020. The participants revealed that the pandemic made it impossible to hold face-to-face meetings, thereby shifting the program to online meetings via Zoom video calls and the use of other relevant technologies. Such changes resulted from physical distancing directives that the government introduced to curb the spread of the disease. Othman et al. (2020) observed that the pandemic had disrupted face-to-face learning activities, including PLC programs, which had to move from physical to virtual meetings. However, the latter study was at a higher education level with relatively better technology investments to support virtual learning activities. Even so, the similarity in findings indicated that the government-imposed COVID-19 movement restrictions were experienced across the education sector. In addition, the need to shift from physical meetings to online implies the importance of those meetings to facilitate PLC practice to all the stakeholders involved.

In contrast, using technology to conduct the online meetings resulted in new barriers to achieving PLC goals. Some teachers reported that physical meetings were more effective than online meetings. The response may have implied that the social interactions through physical meetings were more effective in helping the teachers learn from each other and ask questions freely. Likewise, Othman et al. (2020) noted that virtual meetings did not allow effective collaborations between the teachers, resulting in a

lack of collective responsibility. Meanwhile, earlier studies such as Turner et al. (2018) found that frequent physical meetings enhanced a collaborative effort by the teachers and eliminated some implementation barriers such as lack of commitment.

Alternatively, the challenges linked to the online meetings may be explained by the presence of many distractors at home. In addition, some respondents also reported difficulties with the use of technology in accessing online meetings during the pandemic. This finding links back to the conclusion by Admiraal et al. (2021), which noted that some teachers were reluctant to embrace new technology, making it difficult to achieve some of the PLC goals. The commonality in participant responses concerning the use of technology may have resulted from the teachers' rigidity toward technological change. The barriers may have resulted from common technological failures such as poor internet access or software problems in some instances.

Limitations of the Study

Every effort was made to establish the trustworthiness of this study through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. However, this study had a limitation regarding selecting this study's participants. The primary limitation of this study was the sampling method. Purposive sampling was used to interview 7 educators in one school district located in the Southern region of the United States. For example, this study was designed to arrive at conclusions on high school educators' perspectives of PLC implementation in minority schools using five respondents from two schools. However, an unanticipated limitation of this study was that no participants agreed to participate from one of the schools. I worked with the other school contact to recruit more

participant which gave me seven participants recruited from that school for the study. Therefore, the study focus became understanding how educators in one school serving primarily students of color described their experiences relating to the implementation of the PLC initiative, including identifying challenges and supports to implementation.

Recommendations

This study explored the perspectives of educators in a school serving primarily students of color describing their experiences relating to the implementation of the PLC initiative. This included what educators identified as challenges and supports to implementation and what they identified as helpful to them in their classroom. Based on this research study, I recommend authentic collaboration within the PLC should be established. Authentic collaboration is paramount to a truly effective team accomplishing common goals within the team. Burns et al. (2018) demonstrated that collaborative leadership processes and data driven systems initiated through PLCs were associated with student achievement in mathematics. Such PLCs promoted professional collaboration among teachers, thus producing better ways to enhance student learning and achievement. Prenger et al. (2018), noted PLCs could be effectively implemented when teachers show the willingness to be proactive and engage in collaborative teaching and learning activities.

I also recommend future research studies regarding PLC implementation could use different research designs. Additionally, varying sample sizes to include educators from other minority schools, geographical locations, and a larger grade span of educators may allow for a more in-depth analysis of the factors identified as challenges and

supports to PLC implementation. The fidelity of implementation theory refers to the degree to which teachers and other program providers implement programs as intended by the program developers (Dusenburg et al., 2003). I recommend this theory as the framework for further research on the implementation process in minority schools. Prenger et al. (2018) linked the different approaches in PLC implementation schools to varying interpretations of the PLC instructions by principals and their staff. Such differences make achieving the programs' goals challenging since the results are not easily comparable.

In a recent article called Caught in the Trap of PLC Lite Essential steps needed for Implementation of true PLC, Riggins and Knowles (2020) noted that the most important step for any school caught in the "PLC Lite Trap" is to first complete a current reality check. Without a clear picture and honest understanding of the true current reality, there can be no progress forward. I would recommend this article for use in further study of PLCs implementation initiative.

One of the goals for using PLCs is to enhance capacity-building within the schools and the communities. When implemented well, a PLC can expose educators to up-to-date teaching strategies in the classroom. A healthy and inclusive PLC supports teachers sharing their knowledge and learning from one another continuously. The sharing of information by teachers can happen beyond a district and thus increase the ability of teachers to acquire knowledge on emerging strategies and new technological tools that ultimately promote learning among students. According to Gilbert et al. (2018), the use of PLC beyond a district not only improves confidence among educators by

expands skills on new approaches leading to sustainable PLCs. More research and more time to share the research results would inform additional implications for practice.

Implications

The findings of this study have implications that may lead to positive social change and may provide insight into the benefits a PLC can offer a school serving primarily students of color. The study provided information on educators' perspectives of PLCs to improve the efficacy and teaching experiences of educators at minority schools. Therefore, effective PLCs may bring about positive social change by improving the quality of education and how PLCs and educators work together to increase best practices (Pang & Wang, 2016). This qualitative research may lead to positive social change in minority schools by helping to improve PLCs, which could improve educator self-efficacy, producing more confident educators (Gilbert et al., 2018). learners benefit from teachers and instructional leaders who display commitment and share visions based on students learning to avoid disintegration in schools. In this case, teachers can improve their learning skills by building on their perusal capacity through collaboration while improvising student learning Sunaengsih (2019). Understanding educators' perspectives of the effective implementation of a PLC and possible strategies to counter the challenge of low academic performance in minority schools could create positive social change. I learned the PLCs could improve the quality of instructional practices if the PLCs are implemented based on this study's findings and other studies referenced in the literature reviewed for this study.

Conclusion

Educators are a school's best resources for student success. Educators transfer to students the knowledge they gain through formal and informal training. Regarding the PLC implementation initiative, this study shows that educators' perceptions are contributing factors in the effectiveness of the PLC. Educators can become the catalysts for educational change and fostering the type of learning environment for change to occur and be sustained. PLCs are vital in school systems today for lasting change. Creating an effective PLC implementation is a process, and each element uncovered through this study takes time to develop. Regardless of the status quo or baseline of a school when initiating change toward PLC implementation, educators must have a deep commitment for continuous improvement to achieve sustainable results. It is important to contemplate that although educators are the main influencer for change, the job is not meant to be accomplished alone. Educator collaboration is widely acknowledged as a powerful tool for educator learning and sustainable school improvement (Gee & Whaley, 2016; Sjoer & Meirink, 2016). A PLC that is well constructed, sustainable, and effective in a minority school setting could be the catalyst for positive social change for the students and the community.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Date: Start Time: End Time:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Male ____ Female ____

I. Introduction

II. Conversation Dialogue

III. General Questions

IV. Questions and Probes

V. Concluding Remarks

I. Introduction

Thank you for taking time to participate in my study. I am interested in gaining knowledge about High School Teacher Perspectives of Professional Learning Communities Implementation in Minority Schools. You are being invited to participate in the study because you are an educator who has participated, or you are now involved in a PLC program. Please feel free to speak openly and state your honest opinions to the questions I will ask.

This confidential interview will be audio recorded as stated in the interview consent form. You will be given a pseudonym to ensure that your personal information and identity remain confidential. Are there any questions before we proceed?

II. Conversation Dialogue

Before we begin, I'd like to get to know you a little more by gathering some background information that may help me with my study:

1. What has been your path to becoming an educator?
2. How long have you been in your current position?

III. General Questions.

Please describe the implementation process of PLCs at your school. (RQ1)

What do identify as challenging barriers to implementation? (RQ2)

How do you feel about the support or collaboration provided to you? (RQ3)

IV. Questions and Probes

Please tell me about your experiences with PLC programs. (RQ1)

How long have you been an educator?

Please tell me about your current PLC implementation process. (RQ1)

How was the current PLC implementation process determined? (RQ1)

Who was involved: the superintendent, the high school educators, the school board, others? (RQ3)

In the implementation process was your previous classroom lesson structure modified in any way. (RQ1)

How do the process activities contribute to the implementation process of the PLC program? (RQ1)

How did your work with other educators contribute to your success in the classroom? (RQ3)

Were you able to use the information shared in your work? (RQ3)

What parts of the implementation process did you find valuable? (RQ1)

Was the teachers' need for professional development incorporated in the implementation process? (RQ1)

How is the educator professional development time built into the implementation process? (RQ1)

Was consideration made for teachers' professional development and collaboration besides a daily preparation period? (RQ3)

What other accommodations were made to remove barriers to implementation? (RQ2)

How do you collaborate with other educators? (RQ3)

How often did you meet and collaborate? (RQ3)

What topics did you cover during your meetings? (RQ3)

How do you feel about the support or collaboration provided to you? (RQ3)

What do identify as challenging barriers to implementation? (RQ2)

How is your current implementation process structured to support student academic needs? (RQ1)

What time does the implementation process allow for students to participate in clubs or extracurricular activities during the school day? (RQ3)

In the implementation process, how are low-achieving students given times for academic interventions during the school day? (RQ1)

What time is allotted in the implementation process for student/teacher mentoring? (RQ1)

Are there barriers would you like to identify in the current PLC implementation process? If so, what aspect, and why? (RQ2)

What other information about the PLC implementation process would you like to share with me? Do you have any stories that came to mind that you would like to share?

V. Concluding Remarks

Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions. Your experiences will help me further understand High School Teacher Perspectives of PLC Implementation in Minority Schools. My hope is that the information will assist in improving PLC's Implementation practices to achieve academic improvement. You will have an opportunity to review my preliminary findings to make sure I convey your experiences accurately. Is there a specific email you prefer me to use to send you the document?