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A Study of the Comparison Between Teacher Perceptions of School Climate and the Existence of Professional Learning Community Dimensions

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Abstract

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By

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MBA, Saint Leo University, 2014

BS, University of Alabama in Huntsville, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Industrial and Organizational Psychology

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Abstract

Research has indicated that there is a direct link between student academic achievement and school quality. Research has also indicated that the leadership style of school principals influence teacher attributes, from adeptness and job contentment to academic focus and engagement levels. Even though the research on professional learning communities (PLCs) is extensive, there is a gap in the study of the perceptions that teachers and teacher leaders have on the essential dimensions that make up a community of learners and on whether the existing climate has an influence on making such a community possible within a school. The purpose of this quantitative nonexperimental study was to explore whether there are predominant characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that affirmed the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions ingrained in teacher practice. Teachers from five middle schools in one north central Georgia school district answered a survey that combined the Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Middle Schools (OCDQ-RM) and the School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire (SPSaLCQ). The findings indicated a statistically significant relationship between the school climate and the degree of PLC dimensions. The principal's behavior had an impact on the teacher's perception of school climate and the student's achievements. The findings supported prior literature on school climate and effective leadership in school institutions. The implications for positive social change included a better understanding of how leadership behaviors motivate teachers, who, in turn impact student achievement.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved grandmother, Helen Louise Kittles, and my gone but not forgotten uncles: Willie T. Kittles Jr. and Narward Kittles. I also dedicate this dissertation to my mentor, Dr. Billie Gordon (RIP); my husband, Alex; daughter, Nia; Mom, Gwendolyn Fields; Dad, Gary Abrams; sister, Ireana Coleman, and nieces, Carrington and Cadence.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Considerable emphasis has been placed on decreasing the achievement chasms between the diverse marginalized populations; an increasing number of researchers are seeking to pinpoint school determinants that influence student performance and are within the range of a principal's authority (see Cawelti, 1999; Cotton, 2003, Hoover, Dempsey, Bassler, & Brissie, 1987; Lezotte & Snyder, 2011; Sehgal, Nambudiri, & Mishra, 2017). Although it has been stated that a principal's leadership capabilities may not have a direct effect on student performance, these capabilities can have an effect on the principal's camaraderie with his or her educators (Cotton, 2003). Because most of a school's essential departmental structures are seriously impacted and regulated by the principal, analyzing the influence of a single administrator on his or her school's student performance levels and climate has become a significant area of interest (McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Cohen et al., 2009).

Hallinger and Heck (1996) stated that school administration is directly linked to student academic achievement and school quality. Principals are becoming more and more responsible for individual student achievement. Research has indicated that students and schools cannot succeed without a caring and competent school principal (Brown et al., 2002). During the cultivation of quality and character of a school, the principal is esteemed as one of the most notable influences (Cohen et al., 2009). Most of the recent empirical literature indicated a principal's skills and leadership style influence an array of teacher attributes, from adeptness and job contentment to academic focus and engagement levels (see Aldridge & Fraser, 2016; Lingam & Lingam, 2015; Sahin, 2011).

However, there remains a gap in evaluating the correlation between student achievement, school climate, and the leadership traits of a principal (Bulach & Lunenberg, 1995; Mackey et al., 2006).

Little is known about teachers' perceptions on their principal leadership styles (Gohlmann, 2018; Hislop, 2016). Teachers are essential in meeting the operational criteria for successful PLC schools; therefore, it is necessary to gather teachers' input and beliefs on whether their school is a PLC and on how well their school is working as a PLC based upon the five key dimensions. The focus of this study was to explore whether there are dominant characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that affirm the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice. Teachers were asked to complete a combined electronic survey format, which included the School Professional Staff as Learning Community questionnaire (SPSaLCQ), the Organizational Climate Description questionnaire (OCDQ-RM) for middle schools, as well as demographic information. This study provides important information to policy makers, district leaders, and principals in their work to implement more effective practices for better student learning outcomes.

Background

It is often difficult to ascertain the direct input principals make towards accomplishing a set organizational objective, such as an improvement in student achievement, predominately because of the nature of the role of leadership (Spillane et al., 2000). Gallup, Inc. (2014) noted that principal talent is a crucial element in enhancing student achievement. According to the Gallup report, when talented administrators

cultivate environments where teachers are highly motivated and productive, it places students in a better position to excel.

A unified framework, created by Hitt and Tucker (2016), merges years of robust research into a single model for understanding effective leadership to improve student performance. According to Gohlmann (2018), the unified framework provides practitioners, policy makers, and institutions developing future leaders a tool to improve academic outcomes for students. The framework stands on the shoulders of three pioneering leadership frameworks: the Ontario leadership framework, the learning centered leadership framework, and the essential supports framework (Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Murphy et al., 2006). Hitt and Tucker chose these frameworks after a thorough review of empirical studies published between 1971 and 2006 that centered on the impact of principals on student achievement. Each of the chosen frameworks identifies specific domains and dimensions of effective leadership that contribute to student achievement (Hitt & Tucker, 2016).

To examine the correlation between followers' perception of the quality of their relationship with leaders, Notgrass (2014) conducted a study that examined followership and leadership with a correlational, quantitative approach using an LMX-7 questionnaire to gauge perception of the quality of the relationship between followers and leaders. The MLQ-5x gauged the preferred leadership styles between followers and leaders. In a U.S based organization of over 1,000 employees, this study tested over 105 certified public accountants. In this study, I explored the perceptions of whether there are predominant characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that affirm the existence

of schools with the PLC dimensions ingrained in teacher practice. Teachers who feel empowered and supported tend to go above and beyond their duties to encourage student achievement. By understanding teacher perceptions of school climate, advances may be made in determining how certain leadership qualities influence teacher commitment and student achievement.

Gordon (2013) detailed the connection between achievement, engagement, and leadership. The author posited principals were directly accountable for influencing teacher engagement which in turn impacted student engagement; student engagement levels were directly related to academic achievement. The author also suggested that without a great workplace for teachers, building a great learning place for students will not be possible. Given that teachers are essential in meeting the operational criteria for successful professional learning communities (PLC) schools, it is important to gather teachers' input and beliefs on whether their school is a PLC and on how well their school is working as a PLC based upon the five key dimensions. Therefore, there is a need to understand how the perceptions that teachers and teacher leaders have on the essential dimensions that make up a community of learners and on whether the existing climate has an influence on making such a community possible within a school.

There is little to no empirical literature that has evaluated the correlation between student achievement, school climate, and a school leader's traits (see Bulach & Lunenberg, 1995; Gohlmann, 2018; Hislop, 2016; Mackey et al., 2006). Allen et al. (2015) suggested that there is an actual need for additional studies in this area to effectively influence student results. Based on teacher perceptions of school climate, I

explored whether there are prevalent characteristics that proclaim the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice.

Problem Statement

It is widely accepted that principals have indirect and direct impact on student achievement (see Hallinger & Heck, 1996, 2010; Jacobson, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Louis et al., 2010; Sammons et al., 2011; Sun & Leithwood, 2015; Waters et al., 2003). Evidence over the past 3 decades of school effectiveness research proposes that the benefits of school leadership for student achievement are indirect, with either an inadequate or statistically inconsequential direct positive impact on student outcomes (Karakose, 2008; Munir & Khalil, 2016; Robinson et al., 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Such favorable effects are more likely to be mediated by a supportive work environment and school climate (MacNeil et al., 2009).

For marginalized populations to receive a high-quality education, it is essential that urban school districts figure out how to successfully educate diverse student populations (Gohlmann, 2018). A primary ingredient in school improvement is understanding the conditions contributing to improved student learning (Gohlmann, 2018). Bryk et al. (2016) noted that school improvement work in the United States has been underway for decades and, while the educational system seems to be getting better on average, there still appears to be a growing disparity between underperforming and excellent schools and districts.

Gohlmann (2018) stated that leadership is an essential element to promoting student achievement and equity, which are integral conditions for success in urban

schools. This is often established through a leader's role in the development of exemplary teaching and by the implementation of school-wide reform (Sanzo et al., 2011). Bedard and Mombourquette (2015) indicated that tying school leadership to student learning assists the closing of learning gaps among students who historically experience failure. Yet, this same literature base has not always agreed with how these conditions are established and supported by school leaders. Robinson et al. (2008) warned that "unless these processes are identified and understood, policy makers and practitioners will have difficulty creating the necessary elements required to achieve the desired effects" (p. 669). In this study, I found a statistically significant relationship between the school climate and the degree of PLC dimensions. The principal behavior had an impact on the teacher's perception of school climate and the student's achievements.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore whether there are prevailing characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicate the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice. I sought to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding teacher perceptions as they relate to PLC dimensions. The goal was to build on existing literature that assesses the role of the principal in teachers' perceptions of their school climate and how that impacts student achievement.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

RQ1: To what extent, if any, is there a significant relationship between school climate and the degree of PLC (high vs. medium vs. low)?

RQ2: To what extent, if any, do the school climate dimensions predict PLC dimensions?

RQ3: To what extent, if any, is there a relationship between demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate?

Theoretical Framework

I conducted this quantitative study design using a survey to compare teacher perceptions of climate with PLC and non-PLC schools based upon 17 descriptors organized under the five key dimensions of a PLC as summarized by Hord (2007). These include (a) shared vision, (b) shared leadership, (c) collective learning or creativity, (d) supportive conditions/capacities, and (e) a review of each teacher's classroom practices by peers (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 1999).

Nature of the Study

A quantitative research design was followed to include inferential and descriptive statistics. Principals from 26 middle schools housing Grades 6-8 in one north central Georgia school district were emailed with a request to survey teachers. Out of the 26 schools, five principals responded and gave their permission. Add information about the teacher response rate and the type of analysis used.

Definitions

Instructional leadership: Instructional leadership is "strong, guiding, and target-oriented culture architects" (Karadağ et al., 2015, p. 82). Their focus is primarily on "improving students' academic output by making the strategies and activities of the school compatible with academic mission of the school" (Karadağ et al., 2015, p. 82).

Leader: A person who holds a position of authority in coordinating the activities of the members of a group to achieve a common goal (Burns, 1978).

Leadership: Leadership is an essential component in the cultivation and sustainment of school climate (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

School climate/culture: The "common values, beliefs, symbols and meaning shared by school members" (Karadağ & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018, p. 47).

School leadership: The "process whereby individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northouse, 2010, p. 3).

Student achievement: Student achievement is defined as "the amount of knowledge and skills students obtain from a particular curriculum" (Karadağ et al., 2015, p. 82).

Transformational leadership: Transformational leadership is defined as "the ability to get people to want to change, improve, and be led" (Smith & Squires, 2016, p. 67). It focuses primarily on "the vision and goals of the organisation [*sic*]" and "replaces the leader as the only one who manages school processes and procedures related to instruction and supervision and demands subordinates to act as change agents" (Makgato & Mudzanani, 2019, p. 98).

Assumptions

I assumed that teachers from each school would voluntarily participate in the study and complete the survey honestly, without bias. Additionally, I assumed that the participants would understand the questions being asked in the survey and answer all

questions presented to them in the survey. It was also assumed that the survey participants would have observed the behavior(s) of their principal in their school.

Scope and Delimitations

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2018) noted delimitations and limitations are intrinsic in every research study. This research study was restricted to teachers in a single district in the north central region of the state of Georgia. Data was collected from teachers in middle schools housing Grades 6-8 through the use of an online survey. This study focused on teachers' perceptions of the existence of PLCs. This study also focused on teachers' perceptions of school climate.

Limitations

This research study was limited to the results of two combined survey instruments at the middle school level, with the inclusion of demographic variables. Data gathered represented the school's climate at a particular point in time and may have been influenced by factors outside my control. Due to question nonresponses, data errors may have existed. The number of participants who opted to respond to a survey question may have differed from those who elected not to respond and created bias. Also, certain survey question answer options may have been interpreted differently by respondents, which could have led to unclear data.

Additionally, conducting research during a pandemic was challenging. Teachers had concerns about exposure to Covid-19 from in-person learning, as well as imminent technical problems that occurred during online instruction. The school district imposed a stipulation that to conduct my study, the principal at each school had to grant me

permission. This posed an additional barrier. Most of the principals did not respond to my multiple requests. This was a major obstacle because I could not contact the teachers directly without the principal's consent. Due to the pandemic, I was unable to make an in-person visit to the schools to introduce myself to the principals and teachers.

Significance

Reform models employed by urban school leadership teams frequently focus on addressing technical practices, such as improving pedagogy, that have demonstrated positive results (Mehta, 2013; Wiggan & Watson, 2016; Williams et al., 2014). More stringent standards for student achievement have prompted many school districts to search for research-based procedures that will positively affect student scores on standardized tests (Allen et al., 2015). With limited studies investigating the correlation between a principal's traits, student achievement, and school climate (Bulach & Lunenberg, 1995; Mackey et al., 2006), there is a definite need for additional research in this area to constructively affect student results (Allen et al., 2015).

Supporting data on school climate could be advantageous in helping schools improve student performance instead of ruminating about reasons for high- or low-test scores. The results of this study may be used so that other principals may benefit from honing and sharing high-leverage practices. Identifying the impact of these key leadership practices can significantly contribute to the effectiveness of the school. As a result, the knowledge and information derived from this study may promote greater understanding of the relationship between principal behaviors and student achievement to policy makers, district leaders, and principals in their work to implement more effective

practices for better student learning outcomes. To systematically improve student performance, school and district leaders need robust evidence about the strengths and weaknesses of both individual principals and their school organization (Kraft et al., 2016). Equipped with this data, policymakers and practitioners can take steps to address individual as well as organizational strengths and deficiencies (Kraft et al., 2016).

Summary

Chapter 1 provided an overview of the research study. The areas addressed in this chapter were the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, theoretical framework, nature of the study, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and definition of key terms. Chapter 2 will provide relevant literature regarding the theoretical framework for the OCDQ-RM and the SPSaLCQ. I will also provide an overview of the relevant literature concerning principal behavior and teacher perceptions, principal behavior and student achievement, and principal behavior and school climate.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a direct link between school administrators, student academic achievement and school quality (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). The success of students and schools largely depends on and is influenced by a competent principal (Brown et al., 2002; Cohen et al., 2009). The purpose of this study was to explore whether there are prevailing characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicate the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice.

The review of the literature provided an overview of the relevant literature concerning principal behavior and teacher perceptions, principal behavior and student achievement, and principal behavior and school climate. It also focused on the theoretical framework of the OCDQ-RM and the SPSaLCQ. My goal with this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding teacher perceptions as they relate to PLC dimensions.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review for this study used a variety of various databases located in the Walden University Library, including the Thoreau Multi-Database Search, Google Scholar, PsycINFO, EBSCOhost, Education Source, SAGE Premier, and PsycARTICLES. The literature search was focused on the last 5 years (2014–2019); however, an exhaustive and complete review was conducted. The primary search terms included *OCDQ, principal behavior, principal leadership styles, school principals, school climate, school culture, student achievement, student success, student outcomes,*

teacher perceptions, and *the organizational climate description questionnaire for middle schools.*

Conceptual Framework

The concept of school climate has been defined in many ways. Halpin and Croft (1963) defined school climate as the "personality" of the school that conveys the perception of teachers concerning their school routine which influences their attitudes and behaviors (as cited in Berkowitz et al., 2017). The premise behind this definition was "based on the measure of a school's openness and assumed six prototypes of school climate" ranging from *open* to *closed* (Berkowitz et al., 2017, p. 427). Cohen et al. (2009) suggested that school climate is reflective on an individual's norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures as well as their experiences concerning school life. Maxwell (2018) defined school climate as "the complex network of social relationships in schools (teachers with teachers and administrators, teachers with students, teachers with parents, students with students)" that is an integral part of a school environment (p. 208). Hoy, Hoffman, et al. (1996) indicated that open climates are genuine and open and have a teacher-teacher and teacher-principal interactions whereas closed climates are interactions that are guarded, suspicious, controlling, restrictive, distant, and disengaged.

The original OCDQ-RM had eight dimensions and was found to be inadequate because it "failed to provide meaningful gradations in climate ratings of schools" (Ellis, 1988, p. 5). It was later replaced by Hoy and Clover in 1986. In 1996, Hoy, Hoffman, et al. decided to develop and test the OCDQ-RM because they felt middle schools had been

neglected. The final survey instrument consisted of 50 items and had six dimensions that depict the behavior of middle school teachers and principals – supportive, directive, and restrictive for principal behavior; and collegial, committed, and disengaged for teacher behavior (Hoy, Hoffman et al., 1996, p. 53; Hoy, 2013). Hoy, Hoffman, et al. (1996) determined that middle schools are a mixture of elementary and high schools. Unlike the OCDQ-RE (for elementary schools), "intimacy is not a dimension of middle school climate" and the OCDQ-RS (for high schools) has a greater emphasis on commitment to school or colleagues rather than to students (Hoy, Hoffman, et al., 1996, p. 54). Due to changes in learning environments, elementary, middle, and high schools have varying climate requirements. Some goal theorists hypothesized that elementary schools emphasize task goals, and middle schools focus more on performance goals. The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore whether there are prevailing characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicate the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice.

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) and the Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL) partnered to conduct both the field tests and pilot test of the (SPSaLCQ developed by Hord (1996). The SPSaLCQ Survey supports five key dimensions: shared vision, shared leadership, peer review, collective creativity, and supportive conditions/capacities (Cowley, 1999). Each of the five dimensions consisted of questions that required responses chosen from a Likert-type scale ranging from five (*high*) to one (*low*). The scales included three statements—two located at each endpoint and one located at the midpoint—to delineate between the high, middle, and low ranges

on the scale (Cowley, year). When calculated, the higher the overall score, the more closely the school was considered a learning community.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts

Research has indicated that the leadership style used by school principals impacts and influences the work performance and job satisfaction of its teachers, the academic achievement of its students, and the school culture (see Baptist, 2019). Previous research also indicated that the benefits of school leadership for student achievement are indirect, with either an inadequate or statistically inconsequential direct positive impact on student outcomes (see Karakose, 2008; Robinson et al., 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). It has been recommended that future research need to study principal leadership behaviors to enhance the understanding of how effective leaders and successful schools are developed (Hitt & Player, 2019). Additionally, it is critical to understand how to better prepare and recruit school principals "through the development curriculum, instruction, and assessment for preparation programs" so that an informed decision can be made when selecting a potential candidate and subsequently hiring them (Hitt & Player, 2019, p. 97).

Principal Behavior and Teacher Perceptions

Effective leadership in schools has been strongly linked to teacher instructional practices, teacher morale and satisfaction, teacher turnover rate, positive learning climates, quality of professional development and coherence of programs (Grissom et al., 2019). There is a direct link between school administrators, student academic achievement and school climate/culture. Additionally, effective leadership makes a

difference in improving learning. When the facilities, resources, and the working conditions are poor, the teaching positions in these schools become less desirable producing a high turnover rate (Grissom et al., 2019). As a result, recruiting qualified teachers becomes difficult with high-quality teachers gravitating towards teaching positions at high achieving schools (Grissom et al., 2019). The leader's responsibility is to identify teachers' staff development needs. This research was important in determining if there was a meaningful relationship between the existence of a professional learning community and school climate.

To examine the perceptions of teachers in the United Kingdom, Munir and Khalil (2016) conducted a quantitative research study to see the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their school principals and the teachers' academic performance in their schools. They collected their data from 2,350 teachers who taught in private and public schools in Pakistan via a revised version of Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire, 5x rater form. The authors found that the teachers perceived that their principals' leadership skills were satisfactory and effective. They also found that the teachers who taught in public schools perceived that their principals did not empower them and made them their (principals') directives. The principals could not offer them incentives based on their performance. The teachers only received a fixed salary without any considerations of their performance and ultimately received promotions based upon the duration of their service without any regards of whether they were capable of school leadership or not. On the other hand, teachers who taught in private schools perceived that their principals empowered them to make policies, develop standards of performance, and offered

performance incentives, rewards, and promotions to the teachers (Munir & Khalil, 2016). Teachers who had autonomy and felt supported rated their principals higher.

Comparing school principals in Israel and the United States, Litchka and Shapira-Lishchinsky (2016) collected data from 568 United States teachers and 541 teachers from Israel. They found that teachers in Israel perceived that their principals displayed transformational leadership at a higher rate than teachers in the United States, in terms of school location and school levels. Regarding the accountability in the United States schools, the authors found that teachers in the United States perceived that they were responsible for carrying out the federal and state mandates while ensuring the success of all students. Ultimately, the teachers believed that they were the ones that were blamed if the students were not successful. Overall, the authors surmised that the United States teachers perceived transformational leadership negatively. The authors also found teachers' perceptions in Israel and the United States decreased as the school level increased. They suggested that as the school level increases, there were more layers of administration between the principal and the teachers (Litchka & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016). Research indicated that the way the principals led influenced the teacher's performance and perceptions. Munir and Aboidullah (2018) suggested that school principals who used transformation leadership can decrease the academic effectiveness of their teachers. However, more research is required to examine what factors define transformational leadership, such as qualifications, experience, and cultural differences (Munir & Aboidullah, 2018).

In order for school principals to understand how their leadership abilities contribute to or detract from the leadership that works best for their teachers, Lambersky (2016) conducted a qualitative study to understand the effects that principals have on their teachers' emotions, specifically, their morale, self- and collective efficacy, stress, and commitment. Using semistructured interviews, Lambersky collected data from 20 secondary teachers (13 females and seven males) who taught in 16 different schools in Ontario, Canada. Overall, the author found that the key factor for improving or deteriorating the teachers' working emotions was their principal's behavior. The principal behaviors that were more likely to practically and concretely shape the teachers' emotional landscape were (a) showing professional respect for teacher capability, (b) encouraging and acknowledging teacher effort and results (e.g., commitment, competence, and sacrifice), (c) providing appropriate protection from experiences like harassment and providing a visible presence in the school, (d) allowing the teacher's voice to be heard, and (e) communicating principal vision for their school to them (Lambersky, 2016, p. 400-401). Research indicated that the way the principals lead influences the teacher's performance and perceptions. Principals who are supportive, committed, and display good leadership skills enhance the student's morale and achievements (Bahala et al., 2018). This study explored whether there were prevailing characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicated the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice.

The study conducted by Lambersky (2016) confirmed previous research that suggested "teacher emotions are important to teacher performance, and that principals

who lead through emotionally responsive and responsible leadership behaviors are likely to improve teacher performance" (p. 400). The author recommended that further research be conducted to determine the importance of these impacts to obtain an understanding of how they compare to other principal behaviors or mechanisms of school improvement. Essentially, research has stated that principal behavior is the key to the teachers' motivation at work, promoting work performance and employee satisfaction (see Elmazi, 2018, Shepherd-Jones & Salisbury-Glennon, 2018; Veeriah et al., 2017). Studies in the West and Middle East found greater achievement outcomes when principals disclosed incentives to keep high-caliber teachers, have control over teacher hiring decisions, or present clear academic expectations (see Aburizaizah et al., 2016; Bryk et al., 2010; Leithwood & Sun, 2012; Robinson et al., 2008). In my study, I sought to extend the previous research in that it provided an understanding of how teachers, who work in public schools in the state of Georgia, perceive their principal behavior and the affect that it has on them and their performance.

Principal Behavior and Student Achievement

Principals who display inadequate leadership is a contributing factor to the low educational outcomes and continuous decline in student performance in public schools (Naidoo, 2019). Research has indicated that academic success depends heavily on the educational performance of educators (Munir & Aboidullah, 2018). Moreover, principals are largely responsible for providing effective and efficient leadership that affects the motivation and morale of their students and their students' achievements (Bahala,

Onrubia, Bernal & Madrigal, 2018). Regarding student success and outcomes, research has suggested that leadership makes a significant difference (Robinson & Gray, 2019).

To understand the relationship between student performance and principal behavior, Bahala et al. (2018) used the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire 5X-Short form (MLQ 5X-Short) to identify the type of leadership that their principal dominantly displayed. They conducted a quantitative descriptive study with 54 private and public-school principals and teachers, who taught math, science, and English. Their findings indicated that the teachers perceived that the principals used the laissez-faire leadership characteristic when their principals perceived that they use transformative leadership characteristics. Based on the teacher ratings, there were disparities between the public and private schools. Essentially, private school teachers gave more effort and were more satisfied which ultimately led to the teachers being more productive and better student achievement. Overall, the authors suggested that the principal leadership style indirectly affected the academic achievements of their students.

Bahala et al. (2018) also conducted a self-assessment with two public school principals and two private school principals using the Multi-factor Leadership Self-Assessment which described the principal's leadership style based on their perception. In the areas of Idealized Behaviors or Idealized Influence (Behaviors) and Inspirational Motivation, all of the principals rated themselves at a 95% rate. Specifically, the principals rated themselves highly when it came to (1) being sensitive to the needs of their teachers, going beyond their self-interest for the common good of the group, and having a strong sense of purpose and; (2) being motivators "to those around them,

providing meaning and challenge to their followers' works" (p. 1605). When it came to the area of Individual Consideration, the individual's need for achievement and growth by the coach or a mentor was focused on and indicated that all the private school principals scored lower than the public-school principals.

Looking at leadership constructs, Hallinger, Dongyu and Wang (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of quantitative research studies to assess if there was any effect of gender on instructional leadership. They reviewed 28 studies, between 1983 and 2014, that included more than 2,500 principals from three countries and that used the Principal Instructional Management Rating Scale (PIMRS). Their findings indicated that the effect of gender on instructional leadership was small, but statistically significant with more active instructional leadership from female principals.

Explaining the effects of instructional leadership on student achievement, Uysal and Sarier (2018) conducted a meta-analysis study within the United States and Turkey that included a total of 68 publications that was derived from only articles published in referred journals, master thesis and dissertations. The authors found that there was a small but positive effect of school principals' leadership on student achievement. They also indicated that school leadership mattered less in the U.S. than in Turkey. Furthermore, the authors found that instructional leadership had a significant effect on student achievement since it related primarily to dealing with school academics. They recommended that school principals in the U.S. use instructional leadership in order to improve the academic success of their students.

Sun and Henderson (2017) explored how a principal who exhibited transformational leadership influenced the standardized test scores as set by the objective of the organizational outcomes. They collected data from the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE), which provided information on student characteristics, test scores, other school characteristics, and school staffing. They examined data for a total of 300 high schools for the 2007-2008 school year. Their findings suggested that two of the managerial practices of transformational oriented leaders – "gathering and learning from performance information and gaining cooperation and support from external stakeholders" – made a difference in the performance of public schools (p. 8). The authors suggested that further research be conducted to understand the concepts of leadership primarily because it is lacking and is essential to providing depth to understanding the role of leadership in public administration organizations.

To investigate the educational performance of students and the leadership styles of school principals in low-and high-performance schools, Makgato and Mudzanani (2019) conducted a qualitative study that consisted of 742 schools, 742 school principals, 12,183 teachers and 16,068 12^{th} grade students. The authors found that there was a positive effect on the educational performance of learners when it came to the democratic leadership style and the transformational leadership whereas a negative effect came from the laissez-faire and autocratic leadership styles. To strengthen the democratic leadership of school principals, the authors recommended that a disciplinary committee be formed with a team of teachers to deal with learners' conduct when it was not conducive to learning.

In furthering an understanding of how principal leadership styles can impact student success, Baptiste (2019) reviewed existing literature regarding transformational leadership and the various ways it can be used in an educational context. He noted that previous research had shown that the leadership of school principals played a significant role in the overall school climate and its effect on student performance. He posited that it is very important to comprehend principals' leadership behaviors and teachers' perception of them. This quantitative study sought to extend previous research in exploring whether there are prevailing characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicate the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice.

School Climate/Culture and Student Achievement

School principals and teachers are responsible for shaping the school culture and improving student academic achievement (Huguet, 2017; Hollingsworth, Olsen, Asikin-Garmager, & Winn, 2018; Karadağ & Oztekin-Bayir, 2018; Sabanci, Sahin, Sönmez, & Yilmaz, 2017). Principals and teachers are seen as the essential drivers who are capable of cultivating the drive and determination of students (Adams, Olsen, & Ware, 2017). When students feel supported in their school environment, they tend to have a higher interest in their academic tasks (Adams et al., 2017).

Melesse and Molla (2018) research suggested that the school culture had a significant contribution to the academic achievement of its students and that when the teacher is committed to his or her profession, the improvement of students' academic achievement is maximized. The authors conducted a mixed method research that included

2558 teachers, students and principals. Data was collected via a 30 close-ended questionnaire and an interview was conducted only with eight principals. The results suggested that the teachers showed commitment and felt ownership to the school, to their profession and to their students' learning as well as to their academic achievement.

Analyzing the impact that leadership has on student academic achievement, Smith and Squires (2016) found that the leadership style of principals – transactional, transformational, inspirational, and instructional – all have a direct effect on the school climate/culture, student learning and outcomes, and teacher satisfaction. By conducting an in-depth analysis of scholarly reviewed articles, the authors found that there was a direct link to student learning and principals who exhibited the transformational leadership style. Most importantly, all the leadership styles play an essential role in promoting positive educational outcomes and creating a positive school culture. Hollingsworth et al. (2018) suggested that leaders who display an instructional leadership style "can help leaders build healthy, positive school cultures ready to embrace change" (p. 1029). Supporting data on school climate could be advantageous in helping schools improve student performance instead of ruminating about reasons for high- or low-test scores. The results of this study may be used so that other principals may benefit from honing and sharing high-leverage practices.

Research has indicated that there is a strong correlation between the quality of school climate and student academic achievement levels (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Jones & Shindler, 2016). Moreover, principal leadership has no impact on increasing student academic achievement when the school environment needs improvement (Lee & Louis,

2019; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2019). In fact, when the connection between students and their learning environment is improved, their school climate/culture is improved (Lewis, Asberry, DeJarnett, & King, 2016). Lee and Louis (2019) argued that the policy conversation needs to be shifted toward an understanding that a "strong culture" is critical for sustainable school improvement (p. 92).

School climate can be linked to the condition of the actual school building. Maxwell (2018) found that the physical environment of a school has an impact on its learning environment. The author purported that when school buildings are attractive and in good condition, it may indicate to students that someone cares; which would in turn encourage better attendance on the student's part. However, when the school building is poorly maintained or in poor physical condition, it may signal to the student that the community does not care about them or value their education. This could result in a decrease in the student's attendance. When students are absent from school, their academic performance suffers. This research study sought to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding teacher perceptions as they relate to PLC dimensions.

Summary and Conclusions

There is a direct link between school administrators, student academic achievement and school climate/culture. The leadership style used by the school principal not only impacts and influences the work performance and job satisfaction of their teachers, but they also impact the academic achievement of students and the school culture (Baptist, 2019). Research has also indicated that the benefits of school leadership on student achievement are indirect, with either an inadequate or statistically

inconsequential direct positive impact on student outcomes (Karakose, 2008; Robinson et al., 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

In this chapter, I discussed the OCDQ-RM and the SPSaLCQ questionnaires in great detail. I have also provided an overview of the relevant literature concerning principal behavior and teacher perceptions, principal behavior and student achievement, and principal behavior and school climate. In chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology of the proposed research, the research design, sampling process, instruments, and procedures that will be used.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore whether there are prevailing characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicate the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice. PLCs are not merely an organized method for collaboration (Hord, 2008). PLCs are a way to organize job embedded collegial learning to improve teacher effectiveness to support student learning to meet high standards (Hord, 2008). According to Hoy and Tarter (1997), schools with healthy climates support collegial relationships among teachers and leaders and emphasize academic achievement of students. "Collaboration among colleagues is a means to an end: enhancing teaching and learning" (Blankstein, 2004, p. 130). This research is important in determining if there is a meaningful relationship between the existence of a professional learning community and school climate.

Chapter 3 introduces the methodology that was used to investigate whether there are prevailing characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicate the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice. In this study, I used the OCDQ-RM for middle school teachers to measure school climate and the SPSaLCQ to determine the existence of PLC dimensions. The chapter is organized into the following sections: research design and rationale, population, sampling, instrumentation, data collection, and the plan for statistical analysis.

Research Design and Rationale

A true experimental or a quasi-experimental design was not appropriate for this study. Experimental and quasi-experimental designs are used to test the efficacy of an intervention (Bärnighausen et al., 2017), which was not the purpose of the present study. Also, these designs require the ability to manipulate the predictor variable(s), which was not possible for the present research.

A quantitative research design was followed to include both inferential and descriptive statistics with the intention of figuring out whether (a) a relationship existed between teachers' perceptions of school climate and demographic variables and (b) a relationship existed between the degree in which a school displayed PLC dimensions and school climate. The school district was selected for its diversity in middle school types (Title I, magnet/choice, traditional, charter) in existence, and the 2 year focus by the district's professional development department with school administrators on implementing effective PLC practices.

Due to my inability to control any factors influencing the participants, nonexperimental was the most appropriate design (see McMillan, 2004). Additionally, only having the potential to reveal the relationships between the variables makes a nonexperimental suitable (see McMillan, 2004). This study was an exploratory, correlational study that examined the relationship between (a) teachers' perceptions of school climate and demographic variables and (b) a relationship existed between the degree in which a school displayed PLC dimensions and school climate.

Two surveys were used to collect data from teachers to identify (a) their perceptions of school climate and (b) the degree in which a school displayed PLC dimensions. The surveys were chosen due to the ease of data aggregation and analysis; the anonymity, and ability for a quick response (see Dillman & Schaefer, 1998). I emailed a web link to the survey to the teachers. The electronic invitation to complete the survey was then opened by the teachers. On the returned surveys, teacher anonymity was maintained through the identification of the school type only and not the individual teacher.

The OCDQ-RM for middle school teachers contains 50 questions with a Likert-type response scale which includes four possibilities: *RO (Rarely Occurs), SO (Sometimes Occurs), O (Often Occurs),* and *VFO (Very Frequently Occurs)*. The OCDQ instrument, originally developed by Halpin and Croft (1963) and field tested in elementary schools, relies on respondents' perceptions to define climate, and confidently asserted that "the climate-profiles may indeed constitute a better criterion of a school's 'effectiveness' than many measures that already have entered the field of educational administration with fake passports, and which now masquerade as criteria" (Halpin & Croft, 1963, pp. 82-83). Later revised by Hoy et al. (1996) to address middle schools, the OCDQ-RM broke down respondents' selections pertaining to climate into six key dimensions. These dimensions included (a) supportive principal behavior, (b) directive principal behavior, (c) restrictive principal behavior, (d) collegial teacher behavior, (e) committed teacher behavior, and (f) disengaged teacher behavior (Hoy et al., 1996, p. 43).

The SEDL and the AEL partnered to conduct both the field tests and pilot test of the SPSaLCQ developed by Hord (1996). The SPSaLCQ survey supports five key dimensions: shared leadership, shared vision, collective creativity, peer review, and supportive conditions/capacities (Cowley, 1999). Each of the five dimensions contains questions requiring responses chosen from a Likert-type scale ranging from five (*high*) to one (*low*). The scales included three statements—two located at each endpoint and one located at the mid-point—to delineate between the high, middle, and low ranges on the scale (Cowley, year). When scored, the higher the overall score on the instrument, the more closely the school was deemed a learning community. Demographic information was also included in the survey. This information included the number of years teaching experience, number of years at the current school, teaching assignment, and the type of school (Title I, magnet/choice, traditional, charter) in which the teacher works.

Methodology

Population

Originally, I intended to pull my participants from 26 middle schools in the district. My intent was to physically visit the schools, introduce myself to the principals or assistant principals, and request to meet with the teachers during one of their staff meetings. I planned to introduce myself and ask them to complete my survey. As a backup, I planned to leave flyers to be placed on their staff bulletin boards. Due to Covid-19, I was unable to meet with anyone in person. Instead, I emailed the principals. After getting approval from three principals, I called the schools that had not responded and sent a follow-up email. As a result, I got two more schools to participate.

The school district proposed the following stipulations in their approval letter: (a) The approval of the principal/chief site administrator(s) must be secured for all schools named in the proposal, (b) The application with all required attachments and this district approval letter must be provided to the principal(s) to inform their decision, (c) The principal/chief site administrator has the final right of approval or denial of the research proposal at that site, and (d) Teachers and others may elect not to participate in the research study, even though the district has granted permission. The district has restrictions about data collection as no collection was permitted in schools between April 2, 2021, and June 4, 2021. The district also clarified that interviews had to be held during nonschool hours and that I could not meet with teachers during their planning time.

Since I did not receive the research approval letter until February 22, 2021, I did not have a lot of time to survey the teachers. Therefore, the time constraints and pandemic forced me to conduct the study with just five schools. The population for both the PLC dimension analysis and climate analysis were drawn from a group of five public middle schools housing Grades 6-8 in one northern Georgia school district. These schools included Title I, charter, traditional, and magnet/choice options. The sample for this study included the individual certified classroom teachers in each of the schools responding to the combined PLC dimension and climate surveys.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

Since it was not possible to collect data from all 26 middle schools, I employed a convenience sampling technique to collect as much data as possible from nearby schools. Using G*Power 3.1, the test family was *f* tests; the statistical test was ANCOVA, fixed

effects, main effects, and interactions; and the type of power analysis is a priori: compute required sample size – given ∝, power, and effect size. For the input parameters, the effect size *f* was 0.25; err prob 0.05, power (1-β err prob) 0.80, numerator *df* 1, number of groups 2, and number of covariates 1. The power analysis calculated that the convenience sample should consist of 180 middle school teachers; however, due to Covid-19 restrictions and constraints imposed by the district, only 30 teachers participated in the survey. As per the central limit theorem for conducting a quantitative study, at least 30-35 responses were required. To ensure a comparative sample, nontraditional schools were eliminated from the sample.

Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I initially submitted an online application with attachments to the Department of Research, Data, and Evaluation (RDE) for implementation in the school district. RDE also required the university to submit an online approval application. RDE staff reviewed the application packet, which was the first screening. RDE sent a letter of denial to me in September 2020 due to the following reasons:

- Sample method appears to be purposive as opposed to convenience
- Unclear how GA Milestones data can be linked to teacher survey responses in order to measure impact/relationship
- The survey scale has generally too few points to be the best scale for a multivariate statistical procedure

I addressed the issues posed by the RDE and resubmitted. Rather than eliminating charter, private, alternative, and combination schools from the sample, I included them.

As a result, the sampling method became convenience instead of purposive. I eliminated the GA Milestones data and added the SPSaLCQ questionnaire.

My revised proposal was approved, and I emailed the principals at each school. I provided the principals with a copy of my RDE approval letter and IRB approval. Out of 26 principals, I secured permission from five to conduct the research online. I then sent the teachers at the approved schools an introductory email. The email included the nature of the study and directions for completing the questionnaire. The OCDQ-RM questionnaire, SPSaLCQ questionnaire, and demographic information were combined into a single format and administered to the teachers at the middle schools through an embedded survey link through Jotform. Surveys remained anonymous and contained no identifying information or link to individual teachers. Each teacher received the original email invitation. Due to strict deadlines imposed by the district, no surveys could be administered between April 2 and June 4, 2021.

The survey provided a "do not wish to respond" option for every item so that each question could be answered before proceeding to the next question. If a participant decided not to complete the survey, they were able to exit out of the survey by closing the page. Once participants answered all the questions, they had to click the "submit" button to transmit their data. Participants' data was anonymous, and they were not contacted for any reason following survey completion.

Instrumentation

School climate was measured using the OCDQ-RM for middle school teachers; and the SPSaLCQ was used to determine the existence of PLC dimensions. The surveys

were combined into a single format titled School Climate and Professional Learning Community Survey for Middle School Teachers, administered electronically on Jotform.

Organizational Climate Description Questionnaire for Middle Schools

The publishers and copyright holders of the OCDQ-RM survey granted permission to use the instrument in this study. The OCDQ-RM for middle school teachers contained 50 questions with a Likert-type response scale which included four possibilities: RO (Rarely Occurs), SO (Sometimes Occurs), O (Often Occurs), and VFO (Very Frequently Occurs). The OCDQ instrument, originally developed by Halpin and Croft (1963) and field test in elementary schools, relied on respondents' perceptions to define climate, and confidently asserted that "the climate-profiles may indeed constitute a better criterion of a school's 'effectiveness' than many measures that already have entered the field of educational administration with fake passports, and which now masquerade as criteria" (Halpin & Croft, 1963, pp. 82-83). Later revised by Hoy et al. (1996) to address middle schools, the OCDQ-RM broke down respondents' selections pertaining to climate into six key dimensions. These dimensions included "a) supportive principal behavior, b) directive principal behavior, c) restrictive principal behavior, d) collegial teacher behavior, e) committed teacher behavior, and f) disengaged teacher behavior" (Hoy et al., 1996, p. 43).

School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire

The American Institutes for Research gave me licensing permission to use the SPSaLCQ Survey. The SEDL and the AEL paired to conduct both the pilot test and field tests of the SPSaLCQ developed by Shirley Hord (1996). The SPSaLCQ Survey supports

five key dimensions: shared leadership, shared vision, collective creativity, peer review, and supportive conditions/capacities (Cowley, 1999). Each of the five dimensions contained questions requiring responses chosen from a Likert-type scale ranging from five (high) to one (low). The scales included three statements—two located at each endpoint and one located at the mid-point—to delineate between the high, middle, and low ranges on the scale (Cowley, 1999). When scored, the higher the overall score on the instrument, the more closely the school was deemed a learning community.

Dimensions

Subtests of the OCDQ-RM

Committed teacher behavior is guided toward assisting students develop both intellectually and socially. Teachers work diligently to assure student success.

Collegial teacher behavior advocates professional and open interactions between teachers. Teachers want respect, and they are encouraged to help each other personally and professionally.

Restrictive principal behavior impedes instead of facilitates teacher workflow. The principal burdens teachers with committee requirements, paperwork, and other demands that take away from their teaching duties.

Directive principal behavior is strict authoritarian behavior. The principal is a micromanager.

Supportive principal behavior is geared toward task achievement and social needs of faculty. The principal has genuine concern for the teachers, leads by example, and tries to motivate by using constructive criticism.

Subtests of the SPSaLCQ

The SEDL and the AEL came together to conduct both the field tests and pilot test of the SPSaLCQ developed by Shirley Hord (1996). As stated, the SPSaLCQ Survey supports five key dimensions: shared leadership, shared vision, collective creativity, peer review, and supportive conditions/capacities (Cowley, 1999). Each of the five dimensions contained questions requiring responses chosen from a Likert-type scale ranging from five (high) to one (low). The scales included three statements—two located at each endpoint and one located at the mid-point—to delineate between the high, middle, and low ranges on the scale (Cowley). When scored, the higher the overall score on the instrument, the more closely the school was deemed a learning community.

Reliability

OCDQ-RM

A subtest of the OCDQ-RM measured each of these dimensions. The reliability scores for the scales were relatively high. The scores for the scales were Committed (.93), Collegial (.90), Disengaged (.87), Restrictive (.89), Directive (.88), and Supportive (.96) (Hoy, 2013).

SPSaLCQ

The tests for reliability and validity were met. The determination for the internal consistency coefficient was a .94 using Cronbach's Alpha. Generally, a .75 or higher indicates appropriate internal consistency of an instrument (SEDL, 1999). The stability reliability coefficient for the instrument was .6147, with the potential to increase or decrease if the sample size increased (SEDL).

Construct Validity

OCDQ-RM

The construct validity of the concept of organizational climate is supported by a factor analysis of the instrument (Hoy & Sabo, 1998; Hoy & Tarter, 1997). Additionally, the predictive validity is also supported (Hoy, 2013). During the past three decades the OCDQ has generated hundreds of studies (Hoy et al., 1991). Researchers have used the approach to assess the connection between openness and other variables (see Hoy, 1972; Mullins, 1976; Schwandt, 1978).

The items are scored by assigning 1) 1 to "rarely occurs;" 2) 2 to "sometimes occurs;" 3) 3 to "often occurs," and 4) 4 to "very frequently occurs." Reversed scoring occurs when the item is scored 4 to "rarely occurs," 3 to "sometimes occurs," 2 “often occurs,” and 1 “very frequently occurs.” For each respondent, each item is scored, and an average school score is computed by averaging the item responses across the unit of analysis, which is the school.

SPSaLCQ

The content validity, measured at three different stages, was deemed to have adequate content validity for the purpose of measuring the model of a professional learning community (SEDL, 1999). When compared with a similar instrument, the concurrent validity was a .7489 with a significance level of .001. When determining construct validity, the known group was compared with another group of teachers. “The higher scores from the school known to be a learning community differed significantly (.0001) from those in the field test” (SEDL, 1999, para. 21). “After testing the instrument,

it was concluded that, overall, the 17-item instrument is very useful as a screening, filtering, or measuring device to assess the maturity of a school's professional staff as a learning community" (SEDL, 1999, para. 24). The survey appeared to be a useful tool to measure the development and sustainability of professional learning communities and work toward school improvement (SEDL).

SPSaLCQ Survey tests for reliability and validity were met. The determination for the internal consistency coefficient was a .94 using Cronbach's Alpha. Generally, a .75 or higher indicates appropriate internal consistency of an instrument (SEDL, 1999). The stability reliability coefficient for the instrument was .6147, with the potential to increase or decrease if the sample size increased (SEDL).

Demographic information was also included in the survey. This information included the number of years teaching experience, number of years at the current school, teaching assignment, and the type of school (Title I, charter, magnet/choice, traditional) in which the teacher worked.

Data Analysis Plan

Once the combined surveys were administered and completed, data was entered for analysis into Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0 for Windows. Descriptive statistics included frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviations. Frequencies and percentages were conducted for categorical (nominal) data. Because frequency is the number of participants fitting into a specific category, it was also important to know what percentage of the sample corresponds to each category. Means and standard deviations were performed on interval and ratio data.

The mean, or what was considered the average, was the sum of the scores divided by the total number of scores. Standard deviation measured the average of the deviations of each score from the mean, or the spread of values in a set of data (Howell, 2007).

Threats to Validity

Memory recall and the tendency to overestimate adherence are disadvantages of self-report (Voils et al., 2011). Social desirability response bias can also be an issue with self-report and instrument validity. Van de Mortel (2008) reported some researchers have utilized a social desirability scale to determine and/or to control for this bias in their research. I chose not to use this process. The researchers reported that for those who did choose to use a scale, almost 50% of them reported social desirability did impact study responses. Therefore, these threats were considered after the data analysis process.

To minimize self-report bias, a statement was written at the beginning of the survey that specifically encouraged participants to be as honest as possible. Therefore, participants may be more likely to report a true answer. Threats to construct validity were minimized through the use of validated instruments OCDQ-RM and SPSaLCQ Survey, which provided appropriate and consistent variable operationalization, question wording and strong instrument design.

Ethical Procedures

Permission was granted by the IRB and the RDE to survey the participants with the OCDQ-RM Questionnaire, SPSaLCQ Survey, and demographic information, and the survey was administered. Completing the surveys was anonymous and voluntary. No participant names or contact information was collected. All participants were assured of

ethical treatment through their voluntary consent to complete the survey. In addition to participation being voluntary, no one in the school district knew who did or did not participate. Participants were advised that they may withdraw from the survey at any time without consequence. The risks associated with participation in the study were minimal. The data collection, reporting and evaluation did not involve deception. The electronic survey data was stored securely on a password protected computer and will be kept for five years. At the end of this date, all participant data will be destroyed. Only I have access to survey data.

Summary

This chapter discussed the methods that were used to address the research questions. The research focused on teacher perceptions as they related to PLC dimensions. The purpose of this study was to explore whether there are prevailing characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicated the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice.

Chapter 4: Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore whether there are prevailing characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicated the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions embedded in teacher practice. Survey data was gathered from five middle school teachers in one north-central Georgia school district. The OCDQ-RM, SPSaLCQ, and demographic information were combined into a single format—titled School Climate and Professional Learning Community Survey for Middle School Teachers—and administered to the teachers at the middle schools. In this chapter, I review the data collection, analytic procedures, and statistical results. The following research questions and hypotheses were examined:

RQ1: To what extent, if any, is there a significant relationship between school climate and the degree of PLC (high vs. medium vs. low)?

$H_0$1: No significant relationship exists between school climate and the degree of PLC (high vs. medium vs. low).

H_a1: A significant relationship exists between school climate and the degree of PLC (high vs. medium vs. low).

RQ2: To what extent, if any, do the school climate dimensions predict PLC dimensions?

$H_0$2: The school climate dimensions do not predict PLC dimensions.

H_a2: The school climate dimensions predict the PLC dimensions.

RQ3: To what extent, if any, is there a relationship between demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate?

$H_0$3: No significant relationship exists between the demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate.

H_a3: A significant relationship exists between the demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate.

Data Collection

I submitted my research application/proposal to the school district's RDE. They denied my request. Based on the feedback I received from the RDE, I revised my proposal and resubmitted it. I then received approval from the Research Review Board on February 22, 2021. The approval letter explained that to begin my research, I had to secure the approval of the principal/chief site administrator(s) for all schools named in the proposal. The letter further stipulated the principal/chief site administrator had the final right of approval or denial of the research proposal at that site. The district imposed an additional stipulation that no data collection in schools between April 2, 2021, and June 4, 2021. According to the letter, the deadline was to protect instructional time during the assessment season and end-of-the-year activities scheduled at individual schools. The district also informed me that meeting with teachers during their planning time was not acceptable and interviews needed to be held during nonschool hours.

Having so many restrictions coupled with the pandemic made data collection nearly impossible. I emailed the principals on February 25, 2021. Between February 26, 2021, and March 3, 2021, I received responses from three principals; one of the principals permitted me, another advised me that her school would not be able to participate, and another responded with a possible yes. On March 4, 2021, I called the

schools from which I had not heard. I was unable to speak to any of the principals. Two assistants asked me to send the email to them and they would make sure it got to the principal. I emailed them the same day. The principals at those schools granted me permission.

On March 15, 2021, I sent a follow-up email to the principals. I only received approval from five total. I never heard from the other principals. Due to time constraints imposed by the school district, I sent an original email invitation to the teachers at the sample schools on March 29, 2021, with the embedded survey link to the OCDQ-RM questionnaire, SPSaLCQ Survey, and demographic information through Jotform. I received 30 responses by the district-imposed deadline, following participant consent. The approved Walden University IRB study number was 05-01-20-0611406.

Description of the Sample

Principals from 26 middle schools housing Grades 6-8 in one north-central Georgia school district were contacted with a request to survey teachers. Of those, five schools where permission was granted to conduct research, teachers were asked to complete a combined electronic survey format, which included the OCDQ-RM for middle schools, the SPSaLCQ, as well as demographic information.

Results

A frequency and percentage statistics of the data were conducted to ascertain the percentage of the sample that conforms to a particular category. The OCDQ-RM questionnaire had 50 questions that assess the teaching climate that is promoted by the principal. The first question addressed is RQ1.

The results indicated a statistical significance between the school climate and the degree of PLC (high vs. medium vs. low), hence rejecting the null hypothesis. Most of the teachers thought that the principal very frequently or often treats teachers as equal (See Figure 1). Approximately 70% of the teachers belong to the above category which leads to the job satisfaction of teachers. Only about 20% of the teachers thought that it occurred rarely or sometimes. Almost 80% of the teachers thought that the principal set an example by working hard himself/herself which occurred frequently or more than often. Only less than 10% of the teachers had observed that this happened rarely or sometimes. The findings indicated that majority of the teachers 26.7% was rarely burdened with busy work by the principals as indicated in Figure 2. The majority of the teachers who go the extra mile with their students was more than often burdened with busy work. Comparing the two categories in the "go the extra mile" statement approximately the same percentage of teachers had been burdened with busy work (See Table 1), but a high percentage 30% indicted that very frequently the routine duties at work interfered with the teaching job as shown in Table 2.

Table 1

Model Summary of Teachers Burdened with Busy Work

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Often occurs	6	20.0	20.0	26.7
Rarely occurs	8	26.7	26.7	53.3
Sometime occurs	7	23.3	23.3	76.7
Very frequently occurs	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 2

Modal Summary of the Routine Duties that Interfere with the Job of Teaching

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
I do not wish to respond	1	3.3	3.3	10.0
Often occurs	3	10.0	10.0	20.0
Rarely occurs	8	26.7	26.7	46.7
Sometime occurs	7	23.3	23.3	70.0
Very frequently occurs	9	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1

Frequency of the Principal Treating Teachers

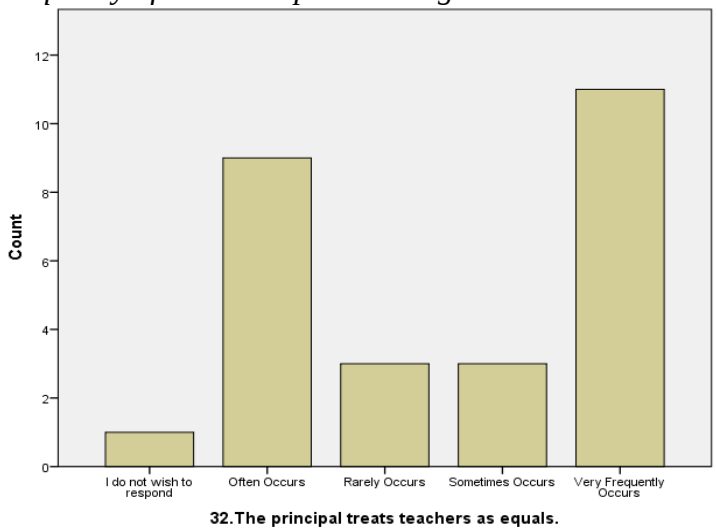
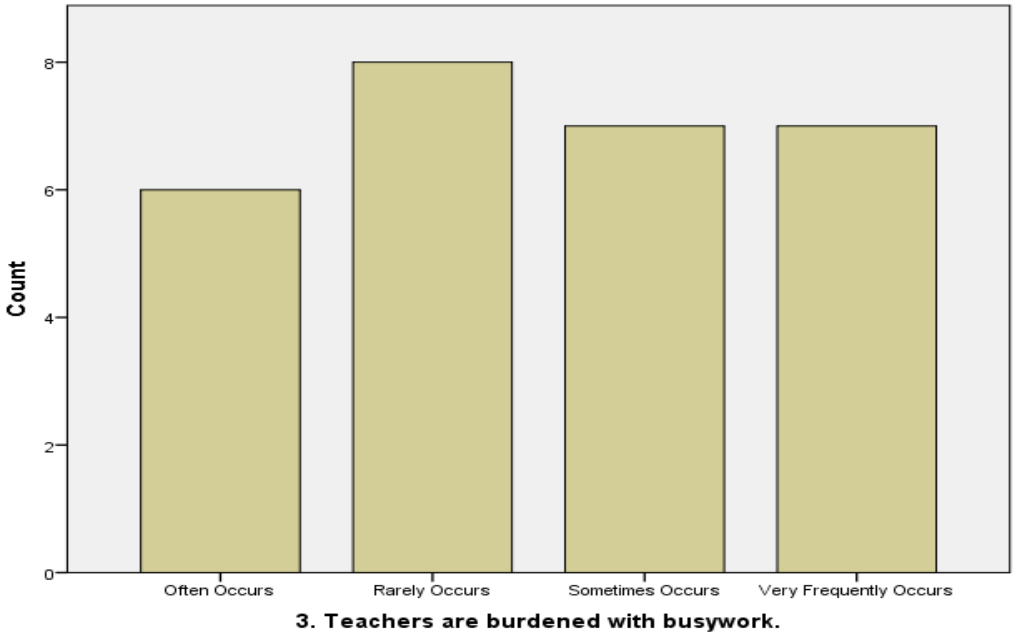


Figure 2

Frequency of Teachers Being Burdened with Busywork

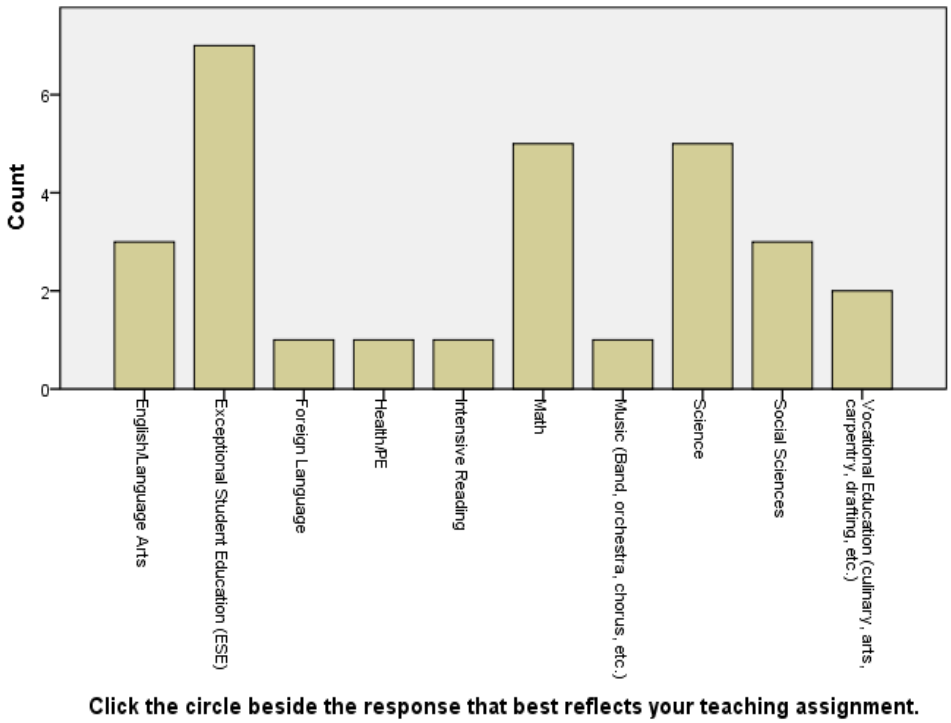


All the teachers who were assigned as intensive reading teachers and music teachers were burdened with busy work more often than other teachers. Social sciences

teachers had been burdened with busy work mostly and vocational education teachers were second-most in the same category. Teachers who taught foreign languages were the ones who were rarely burdened by busywork as shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

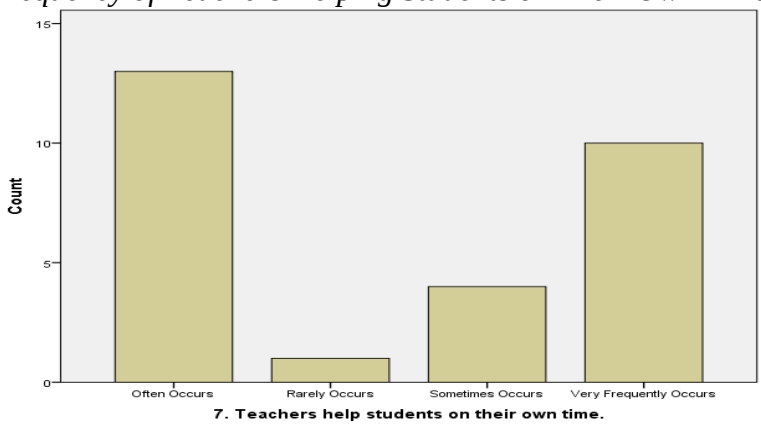
Histogram of the Teachers' Assignment



The teachers who were committed to helping their students very frequently were more likely to help them on their own time very frequently which can be identified as 45% of the teachers (See Figure 4). Another 40% in the same category tended to help their students often in their own time. In the category where teachers were committed to helping their students often, there were no teachers who helped their students rarely in their own time. 62.5% of the teachers did this in their own time often but only 12.5% did this in their own time very frequently.

Figure 4

Frequency of Teachers Helping Students on Their Own Time



Teachers were committed to helping their students as 66.7% of the teachers were very frequently attending to their students as indicated in Table 3. The majority of the teachers, 53.3% of the teachers very frequently go the extra mile to help the students (See Table 4). 33.3% of the teachers very frequently helped the students during their own time which was quite low as opposed to 43.3% who often used their own time to help students (See Figure 4).

Table 3

Teacher Commitment to Helping Students

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Often occurs	8	26.7	26.7	33.3
Very frequently occurs	20	66.7	66.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 4

Frequency of Teachers Going the Extreme Mile With Their Students

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Often occurs	12	40.0	40.0	46.7
Very frequently occurs	16	53.3	53.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Teachers who said that the principal complimented them very frequently 50% (See Table 5), had given higher ratings for their supportive behavior than others (See Figure 5). The teachers who had stated that the principal rarely complimented them, had given lower ratings and it had a higher range compared to other rating categories. The second-highest ratings were given by the teachers who had stated that this occurred often the ratings they had given show a high variety compared to the very frequent category (See Table 5).

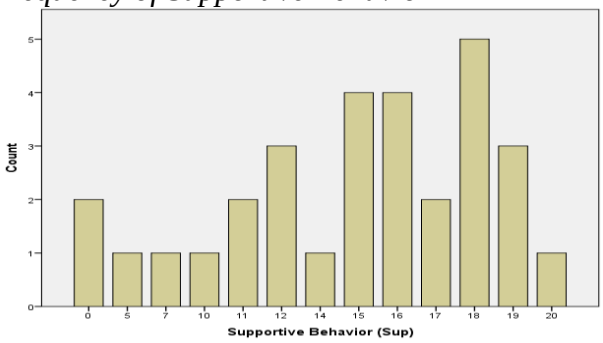
Table 5

Frequency of the Principal Complimenting Teachers

	frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Often occurs	9	30.0	30.0	36.7
Rarely occurs	2	6.7	6.7	43.3
Sometimes occurs	2	6.7	6.7	50.0
Very frequently occurs	15	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Figure 5

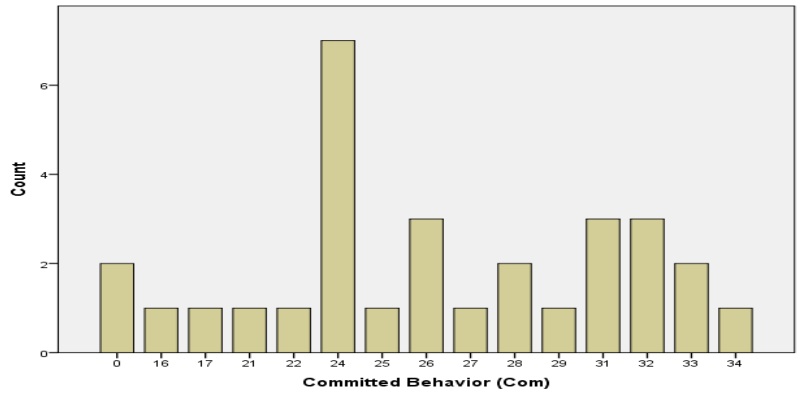
Frequency of Supportive Behavior



The teachers who stated that the principal sets an example by working hard himself/herself had given the highest ratings for their committed behavior (See Figure 6). The second-highest rating had been given by the very frequent category and they had given ratings with a lesser variety of values compared to the previous category. Often occurs category had also shown a higher value of the committed behavior, but their dispersion was low. The teachers who had refused to respond show a variety of values for the committed behavior.

Figure 6

Committed Behavior



Most of the participants (40%) indicated that the principal closely supervised the teachers (See Figure 7). From the graph drawn, it can be identified that the teachers who believed that the principal closely checked teacher activities often had given a higher rating for the directive behavior than the others (see Figure 8). The lowest ratings for the directive behavior were given by the teachers who had refused to respond to the question. The second-highest rating was given by the very frequent category and it was important to identify that the values given were laying within very small intervals which led to the conclusion that they had given more or less the same rating score for the directive behavior of the principal (See Figure 8).

Figure 7

Frequency of Close Teacher Supervision by the Principal

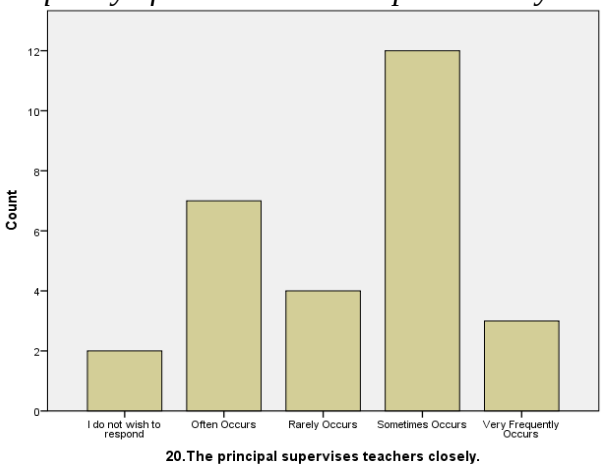
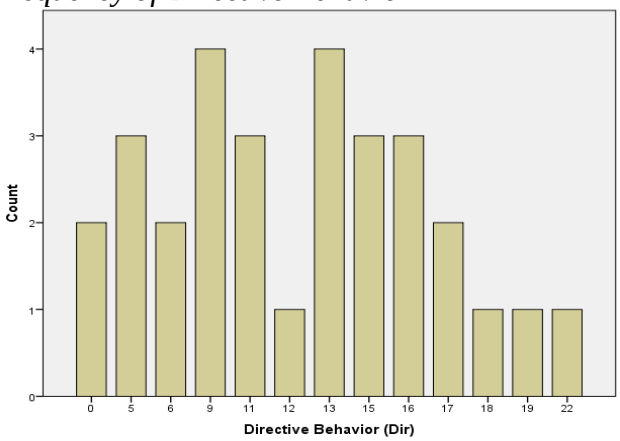


Figure 8

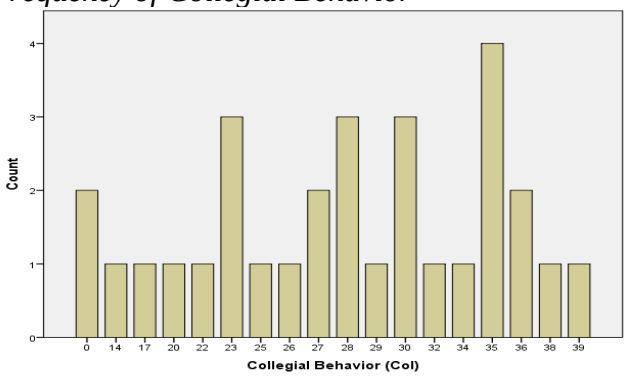
Frequency of Directive Behavior



Most of the participants (13.3%) supported collegial behavior as indicated in Figure 9. The data had low variability.

Figure 9

Frequency of Collegial Behavior



The second question addressed was RQ2. The principal very frequently complimented the teachers at 50.0%, as indicated in Table 5. Teachers often (40%) had parties to teach others (See Table 6). Teachers were supportive of each other as results indicated that majority (63.3%) of the time teachers rarely interrupted each other at meetings (See Table 7). 60% of the participants indicated that the principal rarely ruled with an iron fist as compared to 6.7% who supported the idea as shown in Table 8. Results indicated that the

principal created a good working climate for the teachers as 36.7% of the participants suggested that the principal very frequently helped the teachers as very frequently (36.7%) the principal was available after school to attend to teachers when assistance was needed (See Table 9). Most of the teachers (33.3%) socialized regularly, but 30.0% of the teachers declined to respond as to whether the faculty members visited each other at home as indicated in Table 10. The results indicated that teachers had a good relationship with each other and were supportive of each other and were committed to their students. The principal created a good working climate as many of the participants (33.3%) suggested that very frequently the principal listened to the teachers (See Figure 10).

Figure 10

Frequency of the Principal Listening to and Accepting Teacher Suggestions

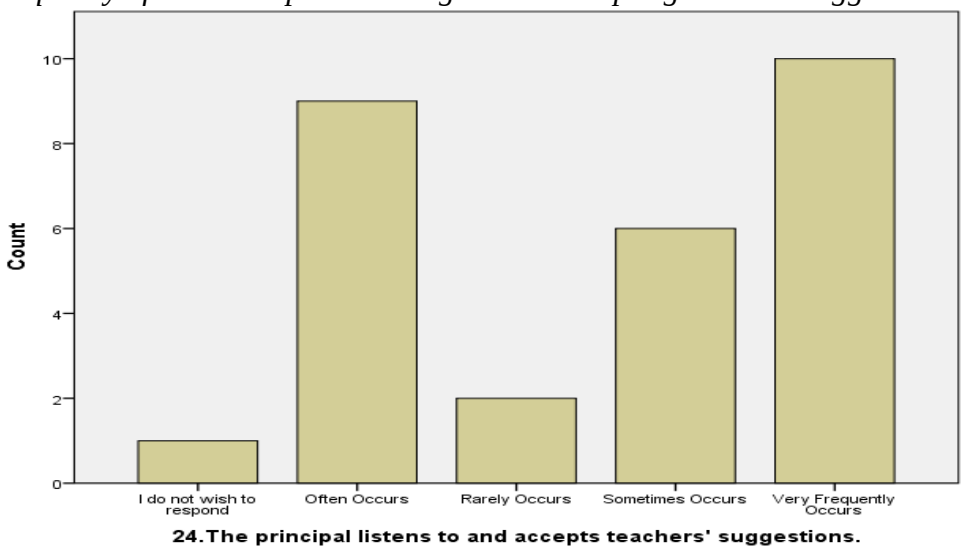


Table 6

Frequency of Indication the Teachers have Parties for One Another

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Often occurs	12	40.0	40.0	46.7
Rarely occurs	5	16.7	16.7	63.3
Sometime occurs	9	30.0	30.0	93.3
Very frequently occurs	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 7

Frequency of Teachers Interrupting Other Teachers During Staff Meetings

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
Rarely occurs	19	63.3	63.3	70.0
sometimes occurs	9	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 8

Frequency of Principal Ruling with an Iron Fist

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	3	10.0	10.0	6.7
Rarely occurs	18	60.0	60.0	70.0
sometimes occurs	7	23.3	23.3	93.3
Very frequently occurs	2	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics of Frequency of Principal Being Available After School to Help Teachers When Assistance is Needed

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
I do not wish to respond	1	3.3	3.3	10.0
Often occurs	9	30.0	30.0	40.0
Rarely occurs	3	10.0	10.0	50.0
sometimes occurs	4	13.3	13.3	63.3
Very frequently occurs	11	36.7	36.7	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 10

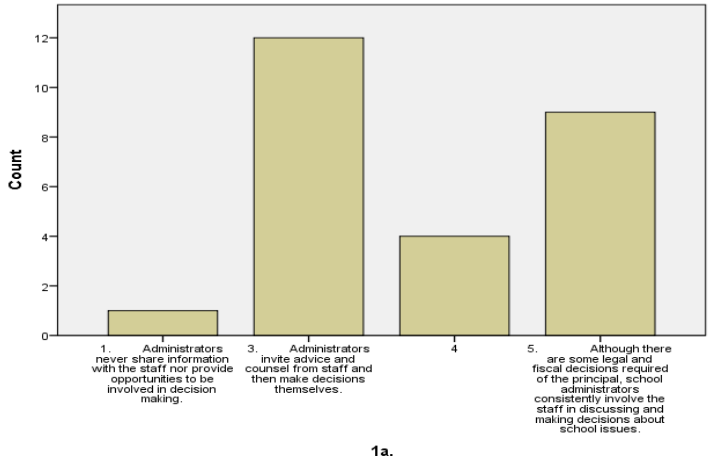
Regular Socialization of Teachers With Each Other

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	2	6.7	6.7	6.7
I do not wish to respond	2	6.7	6.7	13.3
Often occurs	10	33.3	33.3	46.7
Rarely occurs	1	3.3	3.3	50.0
sometimes occurs	9	30.0	30.0	80.0
Very frequently occurs	6	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

The majority of the staff (43.3%) discussed the quality of their teaching and students' learning and 46.7% of the teachers based on their learnings made and implemented plans that addressed student's needs, more effective teaching, and successful student learning as indicated in Figure 11. Decision-making involved the administrators, teachers, and the principal as indicated in Figure 11.

Figure 11

Prevalence of Decision Making in Schools



The majority of the participants (43.3%) suggested that visions for the improvements were discussed by the entire staff such that consensus and a shared vision resulted, 56.7% indicated that quality improvement visions were teaching and learning-oriented, and 53.3% of the visions were targeted on high-quality learning experiences for all (See Table 11).

Table 11

Summary of the Quality Improvement Vision

	Valid (*N*)	Frequency	percent
Visions for improvement are discussed by the entire staff	6	13	43.3
Visions improvement are always focused on teaching and learning	6	17	56.7
Visions for improvement target a high-quality learning experience	4	16	53.3

In decision making, 46.7% of the participants suggested that the staff met regularly and frequently on student-related issues, 43.3%, the staff discussed the quality of teaching and students' learning, 46.7% of the decision making by the staff was based on the learnings and implementing plans that met the needs of the teaching for effective and successful student learning, and 43.3%, the staff debriefed and assessed the impact of the action and made revisions as indicated in Table 12.

Table 12

Summary of Decision Making

	frequency	percentage
Individuals randomly address issues	4	13.3
The entire staff discuss issues	12	40
The staff meet occasionally on student-centered educational issues	7	23.3
The staff meets regularly on student issues	14	46.7
the staff does not often discuss instructional practices	3	10.0
The staff discusses the quality of teaching and students learning	13	43.3
The staff occasionally acts on their learning and implement plans that improve learning	3	10.0
The staff implements plans for effective learning based on their learning	14	46.7
The staff infrequently assess their actions and makes revisions	5	16.7
The staff debriefs and assess the impact of their actions	13	43.3

Based on the disengaged answers, the majority of the staff members (50.0%) occasionally visited and observed one another teaching and 23.3% of the teachers discussed the non-teaching issue after classroom and provided feedback to one another about teaching based on the observations as indicated in Table 13 and 14 respectively. 23.3% of the participants supported the disengaged behavior (See Figure 12).

Table 13

Summary of the Disengaged Answer (4a)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	5	16.7	16.7	16.7
1. Staff members visit their peer's classrooms	2	6.7	6.7	23.3
2.	1	3.3	3.3	26.7
3. Staff members occasionally visit and observe one teaching	15	50.0	50.0	76.7
4.	4	13.3	13.3	90.0
5. Staff members regularly and frequently visit and observe one another's classroom teaching	3	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

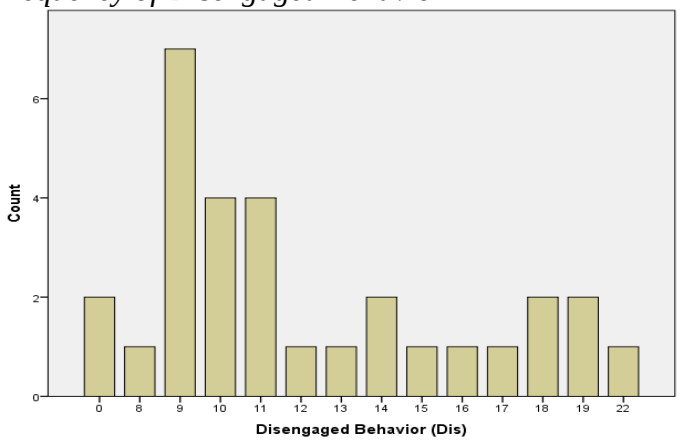
Table 14

Summary of the Designate Answer (4b)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
1. Staff members do not interact after classroom observations	2	6.7	6.7	20.0
2.	1	3.3	3.3	23.3
3. Staff members occasionally visit and observe one teaching	7	23.3	23.3	46.7
4.	9	30.0	30.0	76.7
5. Staff members regularly and frequently visit and observe one another's classroom teaching	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Figure 12

Frequency of Disengaged Behavior



The majority of the participants (16.7%) supported the restrictive behavior, a smaller percentage compared to the disengaged behavior (See Figure 13). Based on the restrictive answer, the majority of the participants (43.3%), suggested that time is arranged and committed for whole staff interactions, while 6.7% stated that staff could not arrange a time for interacting as shown in Table 15. 40.0% of the sample agreed that the size, structure, and arrangements of the school, the staff were working to maximize interaction (See Table 16). 43.3% supported the restrictions on a variety of processes and procedures were used to encourage staff communication as indicated in Table 17. 30.0% of the participants believed that some of the staff members were trusting and open as opposed to 3.3% who believed that trust and openness did not exist among the staff members (See Table 18). A higher percentage (30%) of the participants believed that caring and collaborative and productive relationships existed among all staff members as shown in Table 19.

Figure 13

Frequency of Restrictive Behavior

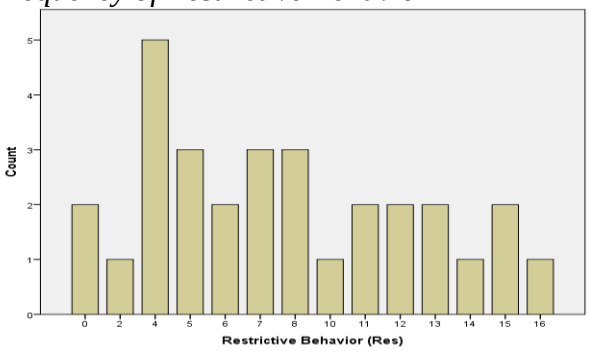


Table 15

Summary of the Restrictive Option (5a)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
1. Staff cannot arrange a time for interacting	2	6.7	6.7	20.0
3. Time is arranged but frequently the staff fails to meet	5	16.7	16.7	36.7
4.	6	20.0	20.0	56.7
5. Time is arranged and committed for whole staff interactions	13	43.3	43.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 16

Summary of the Restrictive Option (5b)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percent
	Valid	3	10.0	10.0	10.0
1.	The Staff takes no action to manage the facility and personnel for interaction	1	3.3	3.3	13.3
2.		1	3.3	3.3	16.7
3.	Considering the size, structure, and arrangements of the school, the staff are working to maximize interaction	8	26.7	26.7	43.3
4.		5	16.7	16.7	60.0
5.	The size, structure, and arrangements of the school, facilitates staff proximity and interaction.	12	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total		30	100.0	100.0	

Table 17

Summary of the Restrictive Option (5c)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
valid	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
3 A single communication method exists and is sometimes used to share information.	9	30.0	30.0	43.3
4	4	13.3	13.3	56.7
5 A variety of processes and procedures are used to encourage staff communication	13	43.3	43.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 18

Summary of the Restrictive Option (5d)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
1. Trust and openness do not exist among the staff members.	1	3.3	3.3	16.7
3 Some of the staff members are trusting and open	9	30.0	30.0	46.7
4	9	30.0	30.0	76.7
5 Trust and openness characterize all of the staff members.	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 19

Summary of the Restrictive Option (5e)

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	4	13.3	13.3	13.3
3 Caring and collaboration are inconsistently demonstrated among the staff members.	8	26.7	26.7	40.0
4	9	30.0	30.0	70.0
5 Caring and collaborative and productive relationships exist among all staff members	9	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

The third question addressed is RQ3: To what extent, if any, is there a relationship between demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate?

H3o: No significant relationship exists between the demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate.

H3a: A significant relationship exists between the demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate.

The results indicate a statistical significance between the demographic data and teachers' perception of school climate. We reject the null hypothesis and conclude that a significant relationship exists between the demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate. The majority of the teachers (30%) had 21 years and more years of experience in the teaching profession (see Figure 14). 63.3% of the teachers had taught consistently in the same school for 2-to-5 years (See Figure 15).

Figure 14

Number of Years' Experience as a Teacher

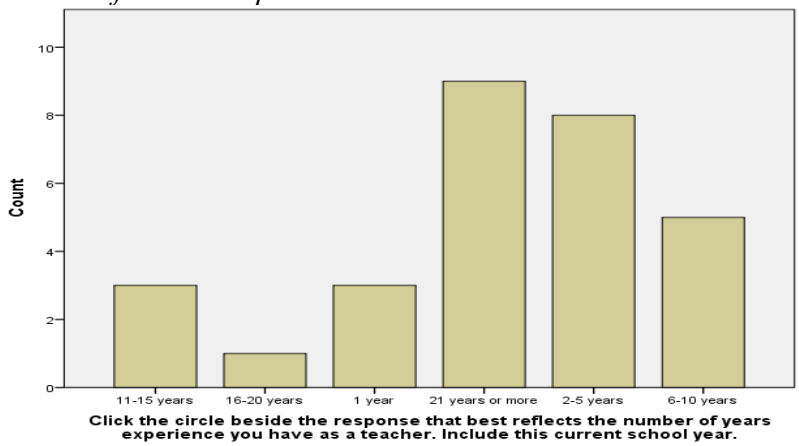


Figure 15

Number of the Years Teaching at Current School

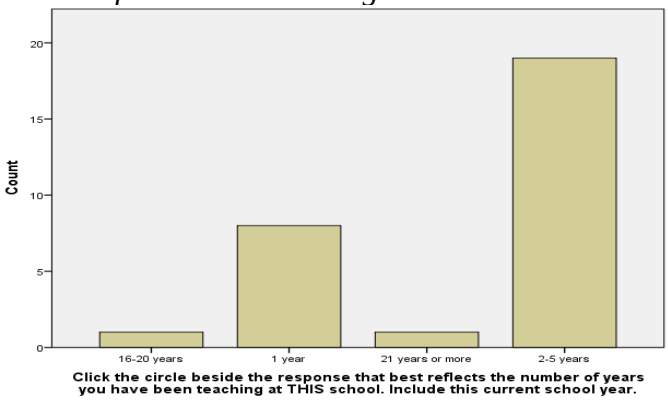
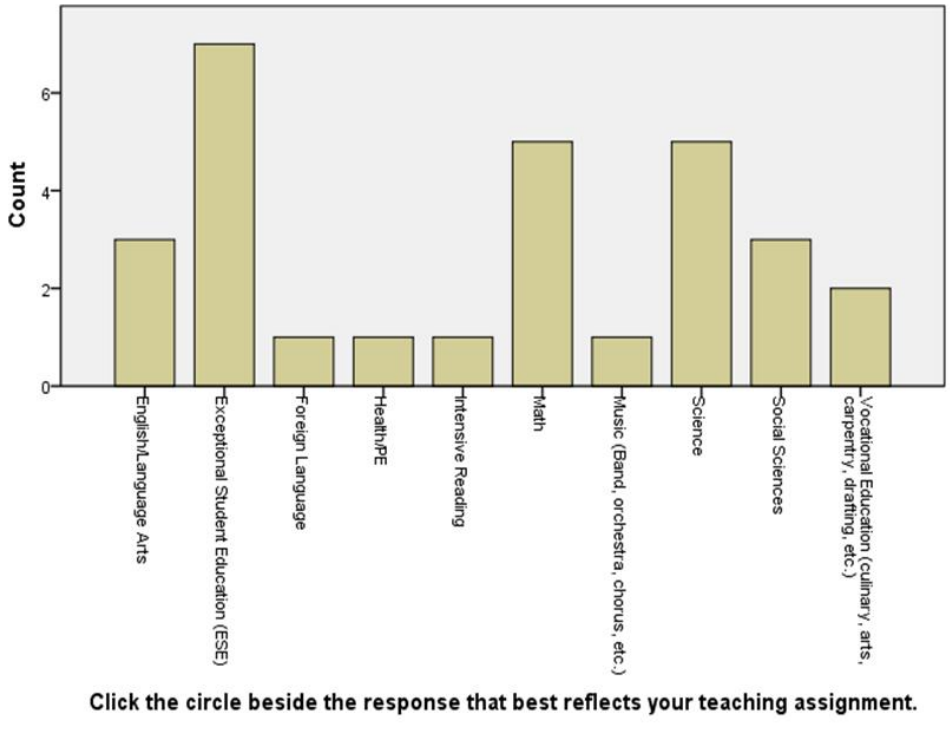


Figure 16

Teacher Assignment



23.3% of the sample taught the exceptional student education (ESE) as indicated in Figure 16. From the sample, 86.7% of the participants teach at Title 1 schools (See Table 20). The descriptive statistics of the behaviors in the PLC dimensions are supportive behavior (*M= 13.97,* SD = 5.24), committed *M* = 24.93 *(SD* = 8.16), directive *M* = 11.53 (*SD* = 5.43), collegial *M* = 26.83 (*SD* = 9.55), disengaged *M* = 11.73 (*SD* = 4.96), and restrictive *M* = 7.87 (*SD* = 4.49) (See Table 21).

Table 20

Type of School

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	1	3.3	3.3	3.3
Charter	1	3.3	3.3	6.7
Magnet/choice	1	3.3	3.3	10.0
Title1	26	86.7	86.7	96.7
Traditional (non-title 1, non-charter, non-magnetic)	1	3.3	3.3	100.0
Total	30	100.0	100.0	

Table 21

Behavioral Descriptive Statistics

Behavior	*N* (valid)	Mean	Std deviation	Variance
Supportive	30	13.97	5.24	27.48
Committed	30	24.93	8.16	66.62
Directive	30	11.53	5.43	29.43
Collegial	30	26.83	9.55	91.18
Disengaged	30	11.73	4.96	24.62
Restrictive	30	7.87	4.49	20.12

Summary

Data analysis was conducted to explore whether there were prevailing characteristics based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that predicted the existence of school with the PLC dimensions incorporated in teacher practice. Data was collected from teachers at 5 middle schools in the north-central Georgia school district. Demographic data and OCDQ-RM and SPSaLCQ questionnaires were employed and the information was formatted titled School Climate and Professional Learning Community Survey for Middle School Teachers. The research questions examined were, to what extent, if any, is there a significant relationship between school climate and the degree of

PLC (high vs. medium vs. low), to what extent, if any, do the school climate dimensions predict PLC dimensions, and to what extent, if any, is there a relationship between demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate? Data collection commenced after IRB approval.

There were restrictions employed due to Covid-19, hence the investigator did not meet personally with the participants. Permission from the principal was granted from five principals. From the 5 schools, 30 teachers responded, hence the sample size. A descriptive statistic of the variables from the questionnaires was conducted. The findings supported the research questions. The OCDQ-RM questionnaire had 50 questions, the demographic questions were four, and the SPSaLQ questionnaires had 5 questions based on the committed, supportive, restrictive, disregarded, and directive behavior options. There was a significant relationship between the school climate and the degree of the PLC dimensions. The demographic data affected the teacher's perception of the school teaching profession.

Chapter 5: Introduction

The research questions that guided the project were, to what extent, if any, is there a significant relationship between school climate and the degree of PLC (high vs. medium vs. low), to what extent, if any, do the school climate dimensions predict PLC dimensions, and to what extent, is there a relationship between demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate. Thirty teachers from five middle schools in the north-central Georgia school district participated in the survey. OCDQ-RM and SPSaLCQ questionnaires were employed to collect data. The findings, conclusion, limitations, recommendations, and implications of the project are discussed in this chapter.

Findings

The purpose of the dissertation was to explore whether there are predominant characteristics, based on teacher perceptions of school climate, that affirm the existence of schools with the PLC dimensions ingrained in teacher practice. The findings indicated a significant relationship between the school climate and the degree of the PLC dimensions. The principal behavior had an impact on the teacher's perception, student achievement, and school climate. There was a statistical significance between the demographic data and teacher's perception of the school climate indicated by the number of years in the teaching profession (21 years and above) and the consistency in teaching the same school (2 to 5 years). The results also indicated that the principal behavior had an impact on the teacher's perception of the PLC dimensions, student achievement, and school climate.

The results in the project supported the findings from prior literature concerning the principal behavior and how it influenced the teachers' perceptions, student achievement, and school climate (see Baptist, 2019; Grissom et al., 2019; Naidoo, 2019; Adams et al., 2017). Research indicated that the way the principals led influenced the teacher's performance and perceptions. Principals who were supportive and hardworking empowered the teachers, as opposed to those who did not consider the emotional and professional efforts of the teachers (Munir & Khalil, 2016). Principals who were supportive, committed, and displayed good leadership skills enhanced the student's morale and achievements (Bahala et al., 2018). Principals and teachers have a responsibility to promote a school climate that supports the students to perform better (Adams et al., 2017).

Limitations

The limitations were attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, unresponsive participants, small sample size, and stipulations imposed by the school district. The project was conducted using OCDQ-RM and SPSaLCQ instruments with the inclusion of demographic data. The project was conducted during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the normal schedule and running of the school were interrupted, hence the time might have influenced the outcome of the results. The survey questions might have been interpreted differently by the participants, hence indistinct data. The Covid-19 pandemic was a limitation as there were no face-to-face interactions with the participants and the occurrence of technical difficulties during online instruction sessions. The school district imposed a condition that the school principals had to grant permission to conduct the

study. Most of the principals did not respond to the multiple requests sent out; I could not directly reach out to the teachers, hence a small sample size.

Recommendations

The findings indicate a statistically significant correlation between school climate and the teacher's perception of PLC dimensions. Recommendations on professional practice and future studies have been made. Recommendations for future studies are based on some of the limitations encountered. The future study recommendations are aimed at improving efficacy and precision in forthcoming research.

Recommendation for Future Practice

There are three recommendations made for future research based on the limitations and findings of the project. The first recommendation is the employment of a large sample in replicating the project. A large sample size increases the precision of the results, effective representation, and the generalization of the findings in the targeted population (Taherdoost, 2017). The second recommendation is the time chosen for conducting the research. The research was conducted in a period of the Covid-19 pandemic, hence the factors that influenced the outcome of the results were not controllable. Future research should be conducted in a period with normality in school routines and schedules.

The third recommendation is researching the different school settings such as middle school, high school, and colleges. The findings in the results were from a middle school in the Georgia district. Researching in diverse settings will provide effective and precise results on the teacher's perception of PLC dimensions.

Recommendation for Practice

Two recommendations on the teaching profession are made based on the project findings. The results indicated that the principal behaviors influenced the teacher's perception of PLC dimensions and students' achievements. Principals are leaders and are responsible for supporting and empowering the teachers for a positive outcome. The first practice recommendation is that the behavior of the principals influenced the school climate and general performance. Principals should incorporate supportive, committed, and collegial behavior to influence the teachers and students positively.

The second recommendation is the cooperation of the administration and teachers to promote a positive climate for the students. The principals and teachers should work together and promote a unified and supportive front to enable students' achievements. Incorporating a positive and empowering school climate will aid in enhancing PLC dimensions, hence better performance from the students and teachers.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

The research questions that guided the project were, to what extent, if any, is there a significant relationship between school climate and the degree of PLC (high vs. medium vs. low), to what extent, if any, do the school climate dimensions predict PLC dimensions, and to what extent, is there a relationship between demographic variables and teachers' perception of school climate. The findings indicated a statistically significant relationship between the school climate on teacher's perception of PLC dimensions. The results indicated that demographic variables affected the teacher's

perception of school climate. The results had the strength and a viable conclusion can be drawn that there is a statistical correlation between school climate and the principals' behaviors influence the teacher's perception, school climate, and students' achievements.

Practical Implications

The findings indicated a statistically significant relationship between the school climate and the degree of PLC dimensions and the principal behaviors on the teacher's perception of PLC dimensions. The practical implication is the adoption of the findings to influence the principal behaviors in creating a positive school climate to promote students' achievements. The principals and teachers can use the findings to promote positive teachers' perception of the PLC dimension, improve student achievements, and create an empowering and supportive working climate.

Future Implications

The findings from the project encourage supportive, committed, and encouraging behaviors from the principals in influencing the teacher's perception of school climate. The relationship between principal behaviors and the teacher's perception of school climate and student achievement was statistically significant, hence the findings can be applied in future practice to replicate the results on larger sample size and varied research setting.

Conclusion

The findings of my study indicated a statistically significant relationship between the school climate and the degree of PLC dimensions. The principal behavior had an impact on the teacher's perception of school climate and the student's achievements. The

findings supported prior literature on school climate and effective leadership in school institutions. The limitations encountered in the project included the Covid-19 pandemic, conditions imposed by the school district, time of conducting the research, and unresponsive participants. The school district imposed the condition that the principal had to grant permission to recruit the teachers for the project. The research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic, the normality in school routines was interrupted. Requests were sent out to 25 school principals, and only five responded and granted permission to conduct the research. Future and practice recommendations were made. The future recommendations include using a large sample size to replicate the project, convenient timing to conduct the research, and diverse settings. The practice recommendation includes the incorporation of supportive, committed, and collegial behavior in principals to impact the teacher's performance and student achievements. Theoretical, practical, and future implications were applied in the project. The conclusion made was viable; hence the principal behaviors impact the teacher's perception and the student's achievements. The results were statistically significant; the project can be replicated in future research.

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Appendix A: Permission to Use OCDQ-RM

Sent Sat, Aug 17, 2019 12:37 am
Subject Re: PhD Candidate Request

You have my permission to use the OCDQ-RM in your research. Best wishes.

Sent from my iPad

Appendix B: Permission to Use School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire

Your permission request has been approved. I have attached our standard license agreement for your signature. The American Institutes for Research, of which SEDL is an affiliate, is not charging a copyright fee for you to use the above-referenced material as described in the agreement.

Please sign, scan, and e-mail the license agreement back to me. After I have received your signed agreement, I will send you a copy of the fully executed license agreement for your files. If you have any questions about the terms and conditions of our standard license agreement, please let me know.

We are delighted that this resource will benefit you as you pursue your doctorate. If we may be of further assistance, don't hesitate to reach out.

Kind regards,

Editor and Copyright Specialist
Publication and Creative Services

Appendix C: Email to Principals

Dear Principal,
I am a doctoral student at Walden University and former Curriculum Coordinator at a private middle and elementary school. I am respectfully requesting permission to provide your teachers with an opportunity to participate in an important study. As part of my doctoral research regarding teachers' perceptions of school climate and its impact on professional learning community dimensions, I would like to survey the teaching staff at your school.

I am aware of the demands placed upon busy teachers, and can assure you that the time required to complete the survey is minimal, taking approximately 15 minutes at most. In order to collect the data both efficiently and with minimal interruption, I would like to survey your teachers electronically. The survey can be accessed from any computer, including from each participant's home. I will provide each teacher with a passcode for online survey access.

My research includes all the procedural safeguards and confidentiality required by Walden University's Institutional Review Board. This verification has been submitted to your district's Assessment, Accountability, and Evaluation Department along with my research application and proposal. Responses will remain anonymous, with survey material destroyed upon completion of the study. Survey results will contain no connection or identifying information to your teachers or to your school.

It is my hope that the responses and participation of your teachers will help fill the void in the research regarding teachers' perceptions of school climate and its impact on the existence of professional learning community dimensions.

Please indicate below your permission for your teachers to participate in this important research. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
LaDwan Johnson
Ph.D. candidate--Walden University
☐ My permission is granted to survey teachers.
☐ My permission is not granted to survey teachers

_____ _____

(Principal's Signature) (Date)

Appendix D: Email to Teachers

Dear Teacher,
I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University and former Curriculum Coordinator at a private middle and elementary school. I am respectfully inviting and requesting your participation in an important research study I am conducting.

This research concerns the relationship between teachers' perceptions of school climate and the existence of professional learning community dimensions in middle schools in a north central Georgia school district. This research will investigate the influences, if any, that school climate has on the existence of a job-embedded community of learners. Should you wish to see the final results of this study, a private Facebook group will be established after final manuscript completion in 2021. **If you agree to participate**, please read the directions below for accessing the survey.

Survey Instrument: The survey instrument you are being requested to complete may be accessed electronically on a ***secure website***. To complete the survey, you may click on the following link: https://form.jotform.com/210874858903466.

Timeline: It will be important to complete the survey at the above link **by April 3, 2021** to ensure that your input is included in this important study. **The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete** and can be completed from any computer having Internet access.

Your responses to the survey will be completely anonymous. Your responses will contribute to the body of knowledge and assist in filling a void in the existing research regarding teachers' perceptions of climate and the existence of professional learning community dimensions.

Should you have any questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you in advance for your participation in completing the survey in the midst of your already demanding schedule. I deeply appreciate your support in my research efforts. Wishing you a successful remainder of the school year!

Respectfully,
LaDwan Johnson
Doctoral candidate--Walden University
College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Psychology Department

Appendix E: Walden University Institutional Review Board Approval

Dear Ms. Johnson,

This e-mail serves to inform you that your request for a change in procedures, submitted on 1/21/21 has been approved. You may implement the requested changes effective immediately. The approval number and expiration date for this study will remain the same.

Also attached to this e-mail is the updated IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include any changes.

Please note, while your request has been approved, you are still not approved to begin your study. Documentation of approval from your partner organization will need to be submitted, to and confirmed by, the Walden IRB before we can provide approval for you to begin your study.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBJzkJMUx43pZegKlmdiQ_3d_3d

Sincerely,
Research Ethics Support Specialist
Office of Research Ethics and Compliance

Information about the Walden University Institutional Review Board, including instructions for application, may be found at this link:
http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/orec

Appendix F: Demographics Questionnaire

1. Click the circle beside the response that best reflects the number of years experience you have as a teacher. Include this current school year.
    - 1 year
    - 2-5 years
    - 6-10 years
    - 11-15 years
    - 16-20 years
    - 21 years or more

2. Click the circle beside the response that best reflects the number of years you have been teaching at THIS school. Include this current school year.
    - 1 year
    - 2-5 years
    - 6-10 years
    - 11-15 years
    - 16-20 years
    - 21 years or more

3. Click the circle beside the response that best reflects your teaching assignment.
    - Exceptional Student Education (ESE)
    - Intensive Reading
    - English/Language Arts
    - Math
    - Science
    - Social Sciences
    - Health/PE
    - Vocational Education (culinary, arts, carpentry, drafting, etc.)
    - Music (Band, orchestra, chorus, etc.)
    - Foreign Language

4. Click the circle beside the response that reflects the type of school in which you are currently teaching (click all that apply).
    - Traditional (Non-Title I, Non-Charter, Non-Magnet/Choice)
    - Title I
    - Charter
    - Magnet/Choice