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Early Childhood Educators Teaching and Learning in Professional Learning Communities: A New Approach to Professional Development for Preschool Teachers in a Southern California School District

Robin Fairfield
Walden University

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Chief Academic Officer

David Clinefelter, Ph.D.

Walden University
2011

Abstract

Early Childhood Educators Teaching and Learning in
Professional Learning Communities:
A New Approach to Professional Development for
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by

Robin Fairfield

M.Ed., Hope International University, 2003

B.S., Hope International University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

Early childhood education teachers have been challenged with the demands for accountability in literacy and English language development, as well as kindergarten readiness skills of preschool children. Researchers have studied professional learning communities (PLCs) as a framework for professional development and student achievement. However, few have studied the effects of PLCs in preschool. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how PLCs support preschool teachers in Head Start and other preschool programs. The research questions involved understanding teaching and learning opportunities for early childhood education (ECE) that can produce positive child outcomes. Using social constructivist assumptions, data collection began with interviews of the leadership team that oversees the ECE services within a suburban Southern California school district. Additional data was gathered from archival records, field observations, and interviews of 20 teachers clustered into 4 PLC groups. Observational data were coded from video recordings via checklists derived from the review of the literature. Interview data were coded for a priori themes based on the literature, were continually reviewed for additional emergent themes, and discordant data separated for later consideration. Coded data were analyzed thorough the sequential method outlined by Janesick, yielding 7 factors related to increasing teacher learning and 4 related to increasing student learning. These results were employed to create a district-wide PLC professional development plan for ECE teachers. The study has implications for social change by supporting collaborative cultures of teacher leadership that continually improve ECE instruction and student learning.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 and the recent shift in focus to utilize preschool as the foundation for success in public elementary schools have prompted a call for strategic reform in policies governing early childhood education. Previously, Head Start and other preschool programs focused on the social and emotional health of young children, as well as their safety. The Good Start Grow Smart (GSGS) early learning initiative of 2002, which was born out of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, was intended to strengthen the relationship between federal and state programs (National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, 2009). The goal of the GSGS was to make certain that children entering kindergarten would have the necessary skills to learn to read at the appropriate grade level (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). The GSGS initiative also directed states to establish early learning guidelines linked to K-12 standards.

Since the passage of the Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007, the focus has shifted once again to the accountability of the development of literacy and English language learners, as well as teacher quality and education. A significant challenge in the operations of preschool programs is hiring, training, and retaining qualified teachers (Ryan, 2004). Furthermore, the Head Start Act requires grantees and delegate agencies to develop professional growth plans for all staff members, specifically noting 15 hours of professional growth per year (HHS/ACF/OHS, 2008). Additionally, the law requires that 50% Head Start teachers nationwide have a baccalaureate or advanced degree in early

childhood education or a related advanced degree with preschool teaching experience by September 30, 2013 (HHS/ACF/OHS, 2008).

In a recent study of early childhood teacher demographics, researchers reported that the education levels of preschool teachers remains dramatically lower than that of kindergarten teachers (Saluja, Early, & Clifford, 2002). This can be attributed to the low salaries and benefits available to early childhood educators, which further obstructs the ability of programs to retain qualified teachers when they obtain advanced degrees.

Policies governing early childhood programs are well-intentioned, and the efforts of organizations are increasingly gaining attention. However, budget and time scheduling limitations have created a barrier for many. Margaret Wheatley, founder of the Berkana Institute, spoke to the need for life affirming leadership. She asked teachers to stand back and look at the big picture in regard to times of failure (Wheatley, 2002). Efforts to change and improve systems fail because of inappropriate implementation processes. Implementation processes are where early childhood educators need to abandon tradition, step out into their communities of practice, and discover relationships with other preschool teachers.

Through this project study, I investigated the effectiveness of PLCs as a means of providing Head Start teachers impacted by the Head Start Act, as well as other preschool educators impacted by state and local guidelines with opportunities to move from traditional teaching practices to teacher collaboration as a means of improving the quality of education for both children and educators. Through collaborative efforts, teachers form new identities, establish new relationships, and receive quality training and technical

assistance to improve curriculum planning to produce positive child outcomes and staff development.

Currently, Head Start teachers can often be found teaching in isolation or operating in silos; however, by implementing PLCs, stakeholders have been validated in their current knowledge and motivated to change the way they assess children's progress, which subsequently promotes improved decision making. Weaknesses and gaps are more easily identified by the teachers when administrators support teachers working with other teachers from sister sites or other district programs. Teachers have seen how valuable learning communities are, and their way of thinking in terms of professional development has been transformed. Unlike the average staff orientation or staff development trainings, learning communities provide teachers with individualized support that is more meaningful and specific to various school or classroom cultures.

The content of this section of the project study serves to lay the foundation to the project by defining the problem, presenting the rationale for choosing the problem, and summarizing the most critical points. Included in this section is a review of the literature that informs the implementation of this project.

Definition of the Problem

The problem was that both novice and experienced early childhood educators, including Head Start teachers, have been faced with the challenges of contributing to closing the achievement gap in the formative years. Many preschool teachers do not analyze data and plan for strategic methods of instruction that meet the new reporting requirements. There are multitudes of methods for educating young children, and there is

a wide continuum of practice and experiences that are extremely diverse (Bayley, 2002). There is a growing body of research that suggests that teaching quality and the quality of teacher-child relationships play a primary role in fostering children's learning skills, development, and school readiness (Domitrovich et al., 2009; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). However, a trend of using scripted curriculum provided by publishers in elementary schools in California has become more apparent. Many state and federally funded preschools have aligned their curricula with that which is used by the school districts into which children will be filtered. Some early childhood education leaders have simply expressed a need for one overall curriculum that covers everything a teacher will need in a preschool classroom. This need may be due in part to funding opportunities in which grantors request research based curriculum, or it may be due to the lack of time and opportunities for teachers to plan quality curricula. In search of research-based curricula, programs have turned to prescriptive curricula packaged with numbered lessons, worksheets, preplanned activities, and assessment tools. Most experienced preschool teachers tend to avoid these kinds of curricula because they do not reflect developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) as defined by Bredekamp and Copple, (1997; 2009) or accommodate individualization, children with special needs, English learners, process art activities, or music and movement. The research indicates that teachers dislike highly prescriptive programs, which often diminish their long-term commitment to their work (Blankstein, 2004; Datnow & Castellano, 2000). Policy makers in early childhood education focus on standardization and academic success. The focus on standards has led to an emphasis on specific cognitive skills and performance

rather than on the process of learning (Scott-Little, Kagan & Frelow, 2005; Brown, 2008). Consequently, the student achievement gap continues to expand, which further promotes practices that compromise teaching philosophies. Student achievement can be improved when teachers use both personal and environmental factors to observe and reflect upon with other teachers (Bandura, 1986). Professional learning communities promote collegial cultures and provide capacity building that sustains relationships and open dialogue (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). Through the implementation process of this study, teacher leadership has emerged in the form of collaborative teamwork.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The Good Start, Grow Smart initiative, which was born out of the No Child Left Behind Act, included an agenda that required states to develop early learning guidelines that are linked to their K-12 standards. As a result, a lack of qualified teachers and the variety of programs emphasizing coordinated systems of high-quality preschool education is a significant challenge (Ryan, 2004).

The California Department of Education publishes statistics via the Internet. The website provides data from all over California using DataQuest. The data in DataQuest is broken down into specific criteria, including the Academic Performance Index (API), Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), English language development tests (CELDT), High School Exit Exams (CHSEE), enrollments and graduations, as well as drop outs and expulsions. The data published for the county in this study identified some disturbing results.

The CHSEE scores for Mathematics and English Language Arts in the 2009 programs for grade 10 revealed less than half of the students tested were able to pass the exam (CDE, 2009). The dropout rates beginning with grade 7 rose annually until grades 9 through 12, where the average percentage of dropouts was 12.9%. The Accountability Progress Reporting (APR) showed that the county in this study had not met API since 2004. Several schools and programs were placed in Program Improvement (PI) under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), and the PI placement years vary. The local County Office of Education (COE) formed a County Achievement Team whose strategies proved to have a positive impact on student achievement scores in high schools and middle schools. Soon thereafter, the COE began implementing leadership training series in an effort to build capacities throughout all divisions in the office. The COE adopted a pledge which stated that all students in the county would graduate from high school well prepared for college and the workforce. All students include those in the early childhood education programs.

The first volume of the California Preschool Learning Foundations was published in 2008. The California Department of Education (CDE) called the foundations a “critical step in their efforts to strengthen preschool education and school readiness and to close the achievement gap in California” (CDE, 2008, p. xi). The CDE encouraged preschool administrators to develop professional development plans for teachers and allow the foundations to be a key element in preservice and inservice workshops because they were designed to assist teachers in becoming more intentional with their lesson plans and teaching strategies.

The Head Start Reauthorization Act of 2007 required all staff working directly with young children have a professional development plan in place, and they must attend no less than 15 clock hours of professional development each year. The regulations require the plans to be revisited annually. In addition, all Head Start employees must have annual performance reviews. Raising the qualifications and development for classroom instructional staff was one of the key components of the reauthorization.

For many years, early childhood educators have seen what the practice of pushdown academics has done to the memories of kindergarten. Gone are the days of kindergarten napping, milk and graham crackers, and half-day classes filled with songs, stories, and playtime. Today's kindergarten standards are yesteryear's first or second grade standards. Today's preschools are becoming yesteryear's kindergarten. Preschools are now being held accountable for preparing children for the k-12 education system.

In Head Start, programs are heavily regulated by the Program Performance Standards, referred to herein as performance standards. Because the performance standards are mandated by the Federal government, staff members are not given the opportunity to negotiate these regulations. One of the many regulations requires teachers to analyze children's outcomes data for planning for increased student achievement. In most Head Start programs, teachers are not trained in a manner in which they can comprehend assessment data results for planning. They have all the information they need, but they don't know what to do with it. Most of the teachers in the target group identified for this study worked with young children in portable buildings often isolated from other teachers, principals, and technology. Consequently, the student outcomes

results have failed to meet the growth expectations for some of the children. The teachers were expected to be professionals and technical experts; however, they find nothing in the world of practice to occasion reflection. When asked how they link their planning to assessment results, they could not articulate the process, even though they know it. They were unable to plan with intention to improve student outcomes, even though they know how to plan for development and growth. They were locked into old habits and comfortable traditions that no longer lend support to today's accountability expectations. They lost their trust in the leadership because their efforts were not acknowledged. For this reason, a cultural shift needed to take place that would move these traditions to communities of practice. However, according to Eaker, DuFour, and DuFour (2002), "Changing the school structure without altering the belief system will not produce fundamental changes" (p. 9). There are no short cuts when building trust because it takes time to dismiss old habits and develop a shared vision for change (Carr, 2008). "It is trust first, followed by vision, strategy and action that work for serious and long-lasting change to occur" (Sergiovanni, 2005, p. 8). One of the best ways to build trust and create a positive social change is to build meaningful relationships.

In order to change the culture, there needs to be an increased interest in the problem (Eaker et al., 2002). Professional learning communities provide an avenue for reculturing schools, and one of the elements necessary to this process is developing a mission, vision, values, and goals (Eaker et al., 2002).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

California's current population growth reflects increases in the number of children who are under the age of 5 and who are culturally and linguistically diverse (California Department of Education, 2007). California has also seen an increase in the number of preschool children in special education (CDE, 2007). Although the literature does not support the number of children in special education programs that are also English Language Learners (ELL), the teachers in Head Start programs are familiar and challenged by this population. According to the CDE (2007), California's diversity necessitates a responsive approach to the manner in which all young children are educated and assessed.

Historically, early childhood educators have objected to relying on scores from standardized assessments to determine school readiness (Freeman & Brown, 2008). They know that all young children are different, and their growth is sporadic as they move on a continuum of development. They also understand that standardized tests do a poor job of measuring the development of the whole child as it relates to competencies that children from birth to age 8 need to succeed in school (Freeman & Brown, 2008).

Patterson, Syverud, and Seabrooks-Blackmore (2008) from the University of North Florida studied and developed a collaborative model for meeting the needs of special education students in regular education classrooms. They identified the challenges teachers face in meeting mandated requirements and the lack of collaboration in elementary and secondary classrooms as well as in most universities (Patterson, Syverud, & Seabrooks-Blackmore, 2008). In their experience, they learned that their individual

expertise was the ingredient that fueled their professional passion (Patterson, Syverud, & Seabrooks-Blackmore, 2008). Outcomes of the UNF project study included bridging the gap between research and practice, providing more time for research and scholarship, and improved mentoring relationships between members (Patterson, Syverud, & Seabrooks-Blackmore, 2008).

Carr (2008) described some of the pitfalls of using teacher incentives for performance. Although she addressed the reasons teachers enter the field, she also identifies the challenges in meeting mandates. "...teachers are already trying hard; they are overwhelmed by federal and state mandates and a whole slew of district programs; this is not the kind of differentiated support they need" (Carr, 2008, p. 1). Yet again, the professional literature reveals a need for a responsive approach to contributing to closing the achievement gap and improving student outcomes.

Schmoker (2006) wrote about the buffer in schools which prevents administrators, boards, and communities from knowing how well teachers teach, and from knowing how well instruction is supervised. A culture of privacy and noninterference has become the status quo (Schmoker, 2006). Teachers operating in isolation prefer to teach the way they believe works best. They keep to themselves, they hoard materials, and they seldom buy into change. "Effecting change when teachers seem fatalistic or defensive, and when the parents believe their schools are doing well and need not change, will continue to be an incredibly complex, intractable problem" (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 64). Teachers working in isolation do not believe they are working in isolation because they have their instructional assistants working with them as a team. The challenge to change

an organization's improvement process is changing people's behaviors, assumptions, values, and habits (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

Definitions

Capacity-building is a process of collectively developing the ability, knowledge, skills, and resources to bring about positive change (Fullan, 2005; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008).

Child outcomes are learning goals (Administration of Children and Families [ACF], 2003). The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework explicitly states the goals toward which preschool children should be progressing over the course of their participation in the Head Start program (ACF, p. 15). When child outcomes are measured, it is assumed that there are changes in children's learning and behavior related to their involvement, and these changes are referred to as gains (ACF, 2003).

ChildPlus is a data system used by many Head Start programs. Information pulled from the software database is used for the purpose of record keeping, analyzing outcomes, monitoring, and tracking services.

Collaboration is a systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve individual and collective results (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 464).

Communities of practice are groups of people who share a common passion, problem or concern about a topic they are striving to increase their knowledge and expertise by interacting as a group on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

Early Childhood Education is defined in this study as a formal child care and education program for young children between the ages of 3-5 years; commonly known in the education field as the preschool years.

Head Start Program Performance Standards are the Federal regulations in which all Head Start grantees must comply with in order to receive government funding to provide services.

Preschool Learning Foundations are guidelines developed at the state level with a goal of ensuring high quality education for preschool children (CDE, 2008).

Professional learning communities is defined by DuFour, DuFour & Eaker as educators who are committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve. Hughes & Kritsonis define it as an approach to staff development and a social change strategy consisting of a group of collegial professionals who meet for the purpose of sharing their learning experiences and then act upon them according. PLCs empower teaching staff to work together with other teachers and administrators to provide quality instruction and improve student development and achievement (2006). In addition, these communities provide a powerful way to improve teaching and learning (Sergiovanni, 2005).

Significance

The problem identified in this project is significant because of the attention and focus on accountability that has permeated the field of early childhood education. Accountability is no longer limited to elementary and secondary education. Blankstein

(2004) said, "...it often appears that public policy itself is harmful to public education" (p. 3). He states that the inadequacies in resources to meet the challenges of mandates and regulations rarely accompany the calls (Blankstein, 2004). Much of what Blankstein wrote about is similar to the work of Schon (1983, 1987). In an effort to shift the focus and improve student achievement, and teaching practices, this project studied how teachers use reflection-in-action (Schon, 1983) along with meaningful individualized support to increase student achievement during the formative years. Being able to reflect and discuss curricular priorities resulted in teachers raising the profile of young children and the importance of addressing educational issues related to their long term growth and development (Page, 2000).

Guiding Research Questions

The research questions have been developed to drive the direction of the data analysis, which informed the creation of my project. The questions include: What is happening in regards to professional development in early childhood education programs at a local school district in Southern California? How can the results of this analysis inform me as to what needs to happen in a broader scale at the county level?

In relation to the problem, many early childhood education teachers in Southern California have been faced with the challenge of educating children and documenting evidence for ongoing assessments using individualization strategies while actively supervising the children. Their strategies and processes have become habitual and have caused them to focus on the tasks of teaching rather than on the quality of learning experienced by the children, and unfortunately, ongoing assessment results have shown

that the children were not achieving the desired results. These teachers have learned that it is easier to do what they've always done; especially when it has always worked in the past.

Children maintain relationships with their teachers and are engaged in learning experiences through play with their peers. They are able to self-regulate and learn to expand their attention. Why aren't teachers engaged in learning experiences through social contacts with their peers? Through positive teacher and child relationships, children have positive learning outcomes. Through positive social context relationships between teachers, they have positive learning outcomes as well (Hawley & Rollie, 2002). It is important for classroom teachers to be actively engaged in the children's learning experiences. Unfortunately, when teachers are concentrating on the day-to-day tasks involved in meeting the required mandates, and they work too hard at the wrong things, they disengage themselves from the relationship opportunities with the children. There is an identified need for an approach that will provide teachers with individualized and meaningful support that is specific to the centers where they work.

Teachers expect professional development to be interconnected with improving teaching strategies in order to improve child outcomes (Cherubini, 2008). However, there is a disconnection between professional development and teaching and learning.

The overall literature is revealing, and early childhood teachers' perspectives are being validated. Preschool children show gains in all areas when their teachers are learning and involved in the children's learning activities during their natural play environments.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this review of the literature is to provide information about Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The literature identified PLCs as having a positive impact on educational change and social justice for all students. The literature on Professional Learning Communities (DuFour, R., DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. 2008); (Lieberman & Miller, 2008) provided the framework for this study along with literature pertaining to educational change (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). An abundant support of significant works, such as *Getting started. Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities* (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002), *Learning by Doing. A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006), and *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work, New Insights for Improving Schools* (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008) are cited to show the need for reculturing schools to PLCs. Other vital works supporting the benefits PLCs have on student achievement such as *Teachers in Professional Communities. Improving Teaching and Learning* (Lieberman & Miller, 2008), *Sustainable Leadership* (Hargreaves, 2006), and *Leadership for Social Justice. Making Revolutions in Education* (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Literature provided by the Association of Children and Families (ACF), a division of the United States Department of Health and Human Services was examined along with statistics from the California Department of Education. Furthermore, the electronic libraries at Walden University (mywaldenu.edu/library) and Vanguard University of Southern California (vanguard.edu/library) were used for research. EBSCO Host, Education Research

Complete, the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), and Education: A Sage full text collection was utilized to retrieve professional online journal publications.

According to the Head Start Leader's Guide to Positive Child Outcomes (ACF, 2003), quality and accountability improves when everyone involved with the child understands the outcomes they want to achieve, the plans for helping the children achieve them, the progress of ongoing assessment, and how to analyze the results.

In this time of accountability movement, teachers are caught between administrative control and professionalism while the number of underperforming schools increases (Bradley-Levine, Smith, & Carr, 2009). Administrative control is referred to as tightened performance standards, and professionalism being the teachers' professional judgment or choice. Internationally, teachers face challenges in trying to sustain improvement over time (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Teachers throughout the United States face heavy workloads and increased responsibilities (Sawyer & Kauffman, 2007). In most cases, teachers are constrained to their classrooms or schools which prevent them from participating in networking opportunities with other teachers. These constraints, often termed as isolation, translate into a lack of access to supportive professional learning (Edge & Mylopoulos, 2008). "Success requires informed and purposeful action based on learning" (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008 p. 174). Hence, the literature is revealing a need for change in professional development.

To understand how children learn, the literature reviewed included the foundational child development theories of Maslow, Erickson, Piaget, Vygotsky, Skinner,

Bandura, Bronfenbrenner, Gardner, and Smilansky. The Walden University online library was utilized to search databases including Psyc Info, EBSCO, ERIC, Education Complete, SAGE, and ProQuest Central. Other sources included Walden University's library of dissertations, my personal professional library of child development textbooks, the library at Vanguard University of Southern California, and professional journal articles accessed through the Early Childhood Learning and Knowledge Center through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration on Children and Families. The use of keywords to search the databases was helpful; however, a better strategy included reviewing references and bibliographies of other researchers, along with the references and bibliographies of their work, and then searching for those author's most current publications adding other keywords. I found this strategy to be the most effective way to saturate the literature. I developed an electronic filing cabinet where I stored the electronic literature for easy access if needed. In print form, I developed a binder system to store the literature in case I needed to reference back during the course of writing.

Some of the theorists' accumulative studies, as mentioned above, have evidenced how young children learn. In brief, Maslow described basic needs and learning, Erickson described the emotions and learning, Piaget described logic and reasoning and how children learn, Vygotsky described social interactions and learning, Skinner described behavior as a function of the environment, Bandura described studies of social learning and motivation, Bronfenbrenner described four types of systems known as the Ecological Systems Theory that impacts the overall development of the child, Gardner described

multiple intelligences, and Smilansky described children's play and its relation to learning (Dodge, Colker, & Heroman, 2002, Charlesworth, 2000).

An investigation on low-income children in Philadelphia, PA., confirmed the above aforementioned foundational child development theories regarding social emotional development and kindergarten readiness. In this study of 5,000 Head Start children, the researchers focused on the influence of early classroom behavioral dimensions and kindergarten readiness outcomes (Fantuzzo, et al. 2007). They found that when the children were interacting with their teachers, engaged in their learning experiences and involved in peer play, their behavior was regulated thereby displaying control of their attention to learning. These children had higher achievement outcomes and were more accepting of teacher feedback; whereas, the academically disengaged children experienced difficulties connecting with the learning activities; especially math (Fantuzzo, et al. 2007). According to Fantuzzo and his partners, these findings are representative of the importance of classroom teachers being actively engaged in the children's learning experiences. The more knowledge an educator has and applies, the better the children will learn (Wasserman, 2007).

Three years prior to Fantuzzo's study of early classroom behavior dimensions and kindergarten readiness outcomes, an examination of the importance of social interactions and positive outcomes was conducted by Fantuzzo, Sekino, and Cohen (2004). In this quantitative study to determine if social interactions or the lack of social interactions affected student achievement a teacher version of the Penn Interactive Peer Play Scale (PIPPS-T) was used over a two year period (Fantuzzo, Sekino, & Cohen, 2004). Again,

5,000 Head Start children from Philadelphia, PA., were studied in their classroom environment while actively engaged in play. Two types of data collections were completed in the fall and the spring using the Adjustment Scales for Preschool Intervention (ASPI) and the Preschool Learning Behaviors Scale (PLBS) to assess the early social-emotional classroom behavior (Fantuzzo, Sikino, & Cohen, 2004). One of the important highlights of this research was that there was a distinction between self-regulation and language development and interactive play (Fantuzzo, Sikino, & Cohen, 2004). According to the researchers, children involved with play activities were less likely to start trouble or become inattentive or disengaged in the classroom-learning environment (Fantuzzo, Sikino, & Cohen, 2004).

Teachers are facing challenges daily regarding what to teach and how to teach so that maximum learning is taking place (Jones, Michael, Mandala, & Colachico, 2008). Teachers need to provide carefully planned curriculum; however, they need to be fully aware of the group of children's individual needs and be ready to adapt the curriculum accordingly to promote optimal learning and development (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Therefore, teachers must be provided ongoing professional development opportunities and instructional support.

Schmoker (2006) has made it a practice to convince teachers and administrators to tour classrooms with a clear focus. During a tour of classrooms, Schmoker noted a few observations including a lack of oversight of instructional supervision for teachers as well as, a lack of teamwork and professional learning communities. He found that even though teachers are in near-universal agreement on the importance of teamwork, teachers do not

work in teams; they do not collaboratively use assessment results to refine lessons and evaluate curriculum for its effectiveness (Schmoker, 2006). Many teachers, although working primarily on their own classroom projects, would deny being isolated from their colleagues or new ideas (Hawley & Rollie, 2002). How can teachers be provided support and ongoing professional development? Furthermore, how can teacher learning and development be sustained?

Many of those who would reform our schools lack the organizational and cultural characteristics of schools that affect student outcomes (Hawley & Rollie, 2002). Most school districts, states, and federally funded programs resort to the easiest solutions. They hire consultants, provide seminars, invite guest speakers, etc. (Lieberman & Miller, 2002). “Much of the professional development offered in schools comes from the outside, is one-time only, and lacks connection to the culture of the school and its teachers and students” (Bradley-Levine, Smith, & Carr, 2009, p. 152). Perhaps, this type of professional development works when the training is adapted to meet the needs of specific groups of teachers; however, this is not the norm. It is common for teachers to attend one shot workshops and return to the classroom with little support and even less application (Lumpe, 2007). Typical conference workshops usually adjourn at the end of the day, and the participants leave with their materials while going their separate ways. Furthermore, when workshops take place on Fridays, the participants may not retain and implement the newly learned material the next week because they haven’t experienced the process of the new practice. In 2006, Sergiovanni agreed:

Although training has its place, most observers believe that it should no longer be the primary model for teacher development. Implementing lists of do's and don'ts, standard skill repertoires, and other scripts is not the way to helping teachers to teach for understanding, to develop student thinking, and to promote generative knowledge. Instead, teachers need to learn to think on their feet, inventing their practice as they go. (p.273)

Inventing their practice as they go is significant because teachers are the ones charged with the responsibility for student achievement as well as the implementation methods for doing so (Williams, 2009).

Teachers, like children, are interested in what matters most to them in their present context. They learn from meaningful experiences and benefit from peer collaboration. However, collaboration is a building process that requires time and commitment (Jones, Michael, Mandala, & Colachico, 2008). Bradley-Levine, Smith, & Carr (2009) contend teachers have to find the time to engage in meaningful interactions with their peers and make time for peer observation, reflection, and conversation. Professionals from all fields are more likely to find time to collaborate and find their experiences meaningful when they are a part of a community of other professionals with shared genuine interests (Madsen & Hammond, 2005; Little, 2002).

Professional development that focuses on skills unrelated to instructional needs will not be meaningful for teachers or impact students' academic gains (Mullen & Huting, 2008). Teachers are drawn to enthusiasm, passion, and energy from others, and they want to belong to an organization that promotes teacher innovation (Lee, 2008). The

work of Austin and Harkins (2008) found that it is unrealistic to expect teachers to consider their work meaningful and take ownership for it without increasing emotional engagement (especially so for those whose work pertains to caring for children and families). This is exactly what early childhood education is all about; children and families.

Education scholars such as Fuller and Little suggest that effective professional development for teachers should be embedded in and derived from practice, ongoing, on-site and school based, focused on student achievement, integrated with reform processes, centered on teacher collaboration, and sensitive to teachers' learning needs (Drago-Severson, 2007). Opportunities to gather at professional conferences, to use technology to communicate with experts throughout the world, to conduct local training and planning events, and to reflect on-site about the realities of daily practice are fundamental elements of professional development for preschool teachers (Jalongo, et al. 2004). Teachers can form collaborative clusters that perform as PLCs where interpersonal development is directly linked to shared goals, which will allow a variety of strategies to flourish in a democratic and supportive environment (Vieira, 2009).

A community of practice is a commonly known term that infers that groups of people who share a common concern or passion interact on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Communities of practice function and survive through the sharing of experiences, memories, ideas, and goals (Zimitat, 2007). Professional learning communities are inclusive of communities of practice with a cultural emphasis on collaboration and team learning. In an effort to transform relationships for creating an

effective school culture that shares a mission and vision that serves to provide extraordinary services to the children and their families, a deliberate attempt is made in the process to shift to a culture of meaningful collaboration.

According to Eaker et al. (2002), this “school cultural shift involves not only meaningful collaboration, but also developing goals, focusing on learning, leadership, planning, celebration, and persistence” (p. 10). The concept of a community of practice focused on culture and team learning comes natural for early childhood teachers because of their deeply rooted child development backgrounds. Senge, the author of *Schools that Learn: A Fifth Discipline Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares About Education*, (2000), poses the question: “What if all communities were dedicated, first and foremost, to fostering the connection between living and learning?” (Senge, et al., 2000, p. 4). Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) give hint to a connection between living and learning as well. Learning communities go through developmental stages similar to the life cycle of birth, growth, and death. PLCs typically start out as loose networks that become more connected as they develop and evolve over time. A collective commitment which includes individual contributions from the members of the learning communities not only address how teachers will work towards school improvement, but also reinforces why their day to day work is significant (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). This process of collective commitment serves to make PLCs meaningful to the members. “Teachers in professional learning communities develop new identities as group members” (Lieberman & Miller, 2008, p. 13). In turn, the members encourage one another and mentor one another through a fresh cycle of learning. Senge

declares that a school culture dedicated to learning would dedicate its resources to those institutions that most shape our development as learners (Senge, 2000). PLCs provide the vessel for such learning to take place. PLCs reject teacher isolationism and open the doors to discover new ways for teachers to improve their craft through collaboration and create a culture of mutual supportive ongoing learning (Hamos, et al., 2009).

Senge's vision of learning organizations was defined by five disciplines: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking (2000). This vision, originally intended for restructuring of business management strategies, took hold in the world of education, and the five disciplines created the means to succeed (Hamos et al, 2009). Through the five disciplines, there has to be a fundamental shift of the minds of the members in the learning community. Once this shift has occurred, organizations are able to continually expand their capacity and become learners for life (Hughes & Kritsonis, 2006).

While forming a PLC at Brigham Young University, Bullough and Baugh (2008) found that when educators were working collaboratively with other educators, friendships formed, a shared language essential to conversation was developed, and trust grew. They conclude that trusting relationships support collaboration among teachers, which improves learning and teaching (Bullough & Baugh, 2008). Trust was identified throughout the literature as a characteristic of school reform. "In a learning organization, the level of trust among members is a crucial aspect to its operations" (Williams, Brien, Sprague, & Sullivan, 2008, p. 5). In an educational setting, trust is a reciprocal relationship that is not automatic; but rather, earned (Williams, Brien, Sprague, &

Sullivan, 2008). In addition, they claimed that teachers may resist collaborative school improvement efforts without it.

The terminology from the literature provides an increased knowledge base regarding professional learning communities and communities of practice. Other terms found included learning circles, teacher networks, teacher clusters, leadership teams, leadership practice communities, and a variety of identifiers that relate to a social context community. In a summarization of the literature Stoll, (2006) termed a professional community of learners as communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. Hargreaves (2003) termed a true learning community as “performance training sects” that provide intensive pressure and support for teachers in a limited number of instructional priority areas (Blankstein, 2003). Throughout the most recent literature, the terminology leads to the conclusion that professional learning communities have the potential to foster a collaborative culture, build capacity and improve practice, and produce positive outcomes for children (Cranston, 2009; Helsing, & Lemons, 2008; Mullen, 2008; Wells & Feun, 2008).

Niesz (2007), an assistant professor at Kent State University shared her reflections in regards to why communities of practice are a powerful source of teacher learning and school improvement. In her article, “*Why Teacher Networks Can Work*” (2007), Niesz recalled a time when a group of professors gathered before one of their regularly scheduled meetings to discuss an upcoming presentation that they were required to do as a group. When Niesz joined the group, she witnessed one member sharing a picture of a family member (Niesz, 2007). Soon after, the entire group was sharing personal pictures

and stories before actually getting down to work (Niesz, 2007). Niesz concluded, “...something changed in our work together that day. We were more relaxed and more invested. We were more vulnerable and more trusting. We were more honest.” (Niesz, p. 607). As she reflected on the time spent together, she realized how the connection made them connect their work and claim ownership of their work together (Niesz, p. 607). This particular scenario is significant because it captured the sense of belongingness, and the sense of belongingness is the difference between a learning community and a team. Communities of practice are alive and organic (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Communities, unlike teams need to invite the interaction that makes them come alive (2002, p. 50). According to Wenger et al. (p. 51), designing for aliveness requires a paramount set of design principles which include: design for evolution, open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives, invite different levels of participation, develop both public and private community spaces, focus on value, combine familiarity and excitement, and create a rhythm for the community. “Because communities of practice are living things, they require an approach to organization design that more fully acknowledges the importance of passion, relationships, and voluntary activities in organizations” (Wenger, et al., p. 64). This can be challenging because living things typically develop into their own individual design (Wenger, et al., 2002).

An emergent curriculum model of staff development was implemented in a Wisconsin based statewide project to increase the quality of childcare in 150 classrooms serving low-income families. The primary emphasis was to promote the professional development of both novice and seasoned teachers from a variety of programs. In this

project, the researchers sought to first investigate how teachers grow and learn in early childhood education. To do this using a constructive approach, they relied on the psychological processes of learning. The researchers identified three processes of teaching and learning as; verbal learning from direct instruction, observation learning from modeling, and self-constructed knowledge from action and reflection (Riley & Roach, 2006). Self-constructed knowledge is knowledge constructed by each individual through reflection on their action on the world around them (Riley & Roach, 2006). This process of learning is identified in child-centered approaches as emergent curriculum, which begins when something fascinates a child and the teacher challenges the children in an unplanned way. Schon, the author of *The Reflective Practitioner, How Professionals Think in Action*, promotes a rigorous use of reflection-in-action. He believes that most professionals know more than they are able to say. He further states that they have "...become too skillful at techniques of selective inattention, junk categories, and situation control, techniques which they use to preserve the constancy of their knowledge-in-practice" (Schon, p. 60). In another book, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner, Toward a New Design for Teaching and Learning in the Professions*, Schon proposes professional education should be redesigned to combine the teaching of applied science with coaching in the artistry of reflection-in-action (p. xii). Similar to Schon's reflective practicum is the concept of emergent curriculum translated into adult staff development.

It is recognized that teachers grow and develop from a relationship with a trusted confidant, another early childhood professional with whom they can create a continuing

conversation about their understandings of early childhood practice, where teachers learn about teaching and learning by observing what happens and discussing all possibilities with other teachers (Riley & Roach, 2006). In order to mitigate isolation and enhance teaching quality, professional development has to concentrate on relationships as a means toward student learning and adult development through reflection and dialogue (Drago-Severson & Pinto, 2006). While working with other colleagues, teachers in PLCs engage in deeper learning to better meet the needs of their students (Rasberry & Mahajan, 2008). PLCs help to create an inquiry stance towards teaching (Snow-Gerono, 2009). “An inquiry stance toward teaching provides for a shift to uncertainty and a shift to collaboration that demonstrates teachers work together for professional development” (Snow-Gerono, 2009, p. 251). Goduto, Doolittle & Leake also speak about collective inquiry being a viable strategy for engaging in dialogue within PLCs (2008). Teaching and learning is the core of PLCs. “In a professional learning community, each teacher has access to the ideas, materials, strategies, and talents of the entire team of teachers” (Honawar, 2008, p. 17). In collaboration, all of the teachers accept shared responsibility and take ownership in their efforts to ensure student achievement (Pennell, 2008).

In contrast to the wealth of literature highlighting the benefits of student achievement and professional development for teachers through the implementation of PLCs, is the practice of isolation. Teachers working in isolation and attending the usual staff meetings will not bring about the benefits known in PLCs (Pennell, 2008; Lumpe, 2007). Isolated practices focus on teaching or student learning, but not teaching and learning for positive outcomes (Wells, 2008). Owell and Kusuma-Powell (2009) made

reference to a workshop presentation when one of the participants called his school an egg-crate school; a model that is great for eggs because they keep the eggs from breaking while in transit, but not a good model for schools (Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2009). The participant said, “In the egg-crate school, we don’t get opportunities to observe each other at work. Despite the recent emphasis on collaboration and team work, teaching remains, for the most part, a very isolated and lonely profession” (Powell & Kusuma-Powell, 2009, p. 47.) He further mentioned that the only things the teachers did share were the parking lot and the heating system (Powell & Kusuma & Powell, 2009). DuFour was quoted in a conversation with Honawar, (2008) as saying, “The beauty of working in isolation and doing your own assessing is that you are buffered from an external source of validation” (p. 18). How can this possibly be a beauty when teachers have been looking for validation and professionalism for years? Breaking the norm of teaching in isolation will be a challenge for some teachers when they have been working this way for a long time (Bezzina, 2006). Coping with isolation has become a rite of passage for many teachers as well as a means for new teachers to prove their worth (Donaldson, 2006). Isolation leaves teachers out of touch with the resources that can help them to become more effective and engaged in their work (Donaldson, 2006). When teachers are working in a culture of isolation, they rarely access more than their own experiences and knowledge to solve instructional concerns they have pertaining to their students (Williams & Matthews, 2005). Learners are not transformed in isolation (Servage, 2008). The atmosphere of an isolating program or school would rarely engage teachers on matters of teaching or provide opportunities for attending professional conferences

(Hawley & Rollie, 2002). Doolittle and Rattigan (2007) argued that the norms of isolation limit and discourage meaningful interaction between teachers (Doolittle, Sudeck, & Rattigan, 2008).

Despite the compelling evidence from the literature, teachers in many schools continue to teach in isolation while others organize themselves into professional learning communities that recognize the power of collaboration as a systemic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). Even the most critical among us have blind spots that require others to identify for us (Servage, 2008). Without time and commitment to PLCs, isolated teaching practices are intensified by permitting a culture of protective individualism community (Little, 2002, p. 44). The reflective practice model of teaching and learning in collaboration while playing the teacher script (Riley & Roach, 2006) supports the choice of genre for this doctoral study project.

Implications

Applying the design principles for professional learning communities as described above, were not analogous to following a recipe for design. The literature review implies that professional learning communities are culturally characteristic of the people involved. In the community of early childhood education professionals in Southern California, quality and accountability has been significant along with the denial of teaching in isolation and administrative control. As I embarked on this study, I ascertained the human connection to teaching and learning.

The research is replete with information relating PLCs and social change. Educational change, social justice, teacher engagement, teacher leadership and ownership are key components addressed in this study through an examination of observations, records, artifacts, and interviews. The application process was characteristic of shepherding the preexisting community (Wenger et al. 2002). The concept of community broken down into the words “common” and “identity”, will need to be further explored as common identities may include professional status and standing, training experience, educational experience, qualifications, and working conditions (Noble, 2007). Because professional learning communities require learning to take place among the members, it may be difficult to demonstrate growth within the learning community if each member is at a similar level of professional development because the knowledge base may be limited (Noble, 2007). “...participation of practitioners of various levels of experience may actually be more useful in providing an examination of the multiplicity of responses that may be applicable to any given situation” (Noble, 2007, p. 135). From this perspective, the possibility of closing the gap between the administrative leadership and the instructional staff is identified as a partnership component because of the opportunity to learn from experiences and knowledge of all members of the group. The dialogic relationship that the learning community approach promotes enables the partnership to move beyond a level of exploration of learning to encouraging them to become knowledge seekers in the process, regardless of their level of expertise (Noble, 2007).

The long term plan for this project is to implement PLCs at the Head Start and Early Head Start level countywide as a form of professional development and mentoring.

These PLCs will empower the teaching staff to work together with administrators to provide quality instruction and improve student learning (Hughes & Kritsonis, 2006). The research has provided a culmination of the need for reflection and learning in the context of established knowledge and experience.

In a larger context, the study will reform practice and lead the way for early childhood education practitioners to examine and consider a similar strategic method of professional development and program improvement in the context of reframed learning. This qualitative research approach was emergent and conducted in the teachers' natural setting (Creswell, 2003). It was the process of observing professional learning communities and their inner workings that informed the guiding research questions previously described. This project study is representative of constructivist leadership as identified and woven throughout the review of the literature.

Summary

Throughout the literature, the human connection and the foundations of trust are known to be the core of teaching and learning through professional learning communities. "...Adults, as well as children, learn through the processes of meaning and knowledge construction...and must engage people in the processes that create the conditions for learning" (Lambert, et al., 2002, p. 6). Providing a supportive environment where teachers are involved in their own learning experiences to take purposeful action towards educational change and social justice is reflective of the current research.

Elements from the research considered as vital to this study included the similarities between child development, human development, and the culture of PLCs.

Through the research, a link was identified between all three as being living things that are culturally characteristic and thrive on engagement and involvement.

Section two provides the methodology for this study including a full description of the research design, setting for the study, and the participants. Information regarding the materials for the study, data collection, and possible limitations are also presented in section two.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction to the Research Design & Approach

This section of the study provides an overview of the qualitative design. This qualitative research approach using the case study design was used to examine PLCs at a local school district involving Head Start and other center-based teachers as a method of professional development in early childhood education. To study this, a theoretical framework comprised of social constructivist assumptions, field observations, and triangulation was used. I visited and observed four preschool teacher cluster groups (PLCs) located in Southern California.

The questions that guided this research project were developed to drive the direction of the data collection and analysis to focus on the creation of my project. The questions include: What is happening in regards to professional development in early childhood education programs at a local school district in Southern California? How can the results of this analysis inform me as to what needs to happen in a broader scale at the county level?

According to Creswell (2007), qualitative research studies are built upon a worldview, which in this case is derived from social constructivism, along with assumptions by the researcher.

Description of the Study

This work was a project study with a constructivist approach, which is emergent and reflective, with my worldview, which includes the theoretical foundations of child development and human development to address the research questions to inquire into the

meaning or understanding that the participants have of the problem and how they view the solution via the implementation of PLCs. This study includes valuable insights into the teaching and learning process, because the participants (20 classroom teachers) provided significant input. Schon (1983, 1987) has written a great deal about the cognitive processes of teachers exploring problems. Most teachers know more than they can say and actually do.

It was assumed that the implementation of professional learning communities in early childhood center-based programs would increase teacher professional development and increase future student achievement (positive child outcomes). Dana and Yendol-Silva (2003) described the relationship between teacher inquiry and teacher professional growth as being a way to seek change by reflecting on their practice. Teacher inquiry and professional growth allow for opportunities to gain new perspectives. Building relationships among early childhood educators further stimulates reflection and the generation of new ideas. When teachers gather to seek change by reflecting on their practice, they ask questions, analyze data, read relevant literature, share findings with each other, and make changes based on new understandings (Dana & Yendol-Silva, 2003). When teachers work collaboratively to become agents of change, their professional growth becomes meaningful and sustainable. This collaborative model approach to training has validated the comprehensive intricacies involved in teaching and learning for reforming practice. In addition to the intensiveness, this implementation is a respectful approach to professional development, which is needed if any kind of instructional improvement is to be achieved (Ryan, 2004).

Justification

Through qualitative research, the emphasis has been on gaining the meaning and understanding of the structure, processes, and effects of professional learning communities of teachers in early childhood education. According to Merriam (2002), qualitative researchers often use this approach when there is a lack of theory that can adequately address the subject.

PLCs are popular in the K-12 education system; however, there are few early childhood education programs actively promoting such practices at the service line level. In other words, preschool teachers are not generally involved in PLCs for the purpose of professional development and future student achievement. Therefore, there is little, if any, quantifiable data that can explain how PLCs benefit early childhood education. “All qualitative research is characterized by the search for meaning and understanding; the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, and inductive investigative strategy, and a richly descriptive end product” (Merriam, 2002, p. 6). For this study, I sought to determine how PLCs as a form of professional development were being implemented as reflected in the literature, and how this process could provide results that would steer me towards the creation and implementation of PLCs in a broader scale (countywide). The overall goal in this study was to be able to provide an early childhood education PLC implementation project and a rich source of literature to inform all early childhood educators, stakeholders, and the community ways to improve professional development and further enhance the future academic outcomes for students at the preschool level.

Setting & Sample/Participants

The setting for this study was the Early Childhood and Family Education programs at a local school district in Southern California. Staff development days took place once a month and were built into the program planning for the year. The staff development portion was typically held in the mornings, and the teacher cluster groups typically met in the afternoon of the same day for a minimum of 1 hour and 30 minutes. The clusters met briefly at staff orientation. At that time, they confirmed their teacher leaders and formed PLCs. I studied the processes that took place within PLCs by conducting site visits to observe meetings, conduct interviews, and review documents, which included meeting minutes, plans, outcomes, and reports used during PLC meetings and staff meetings.

The participants for the project study included a total of 20 preschool teachers in Southern California who were chosen because of their interests in participating in the implementation of PLCs at the preschool level. Of the 20 preschool teachers, four cluster groups were formed because of their geographical locations, along with the communities in which they serve. Each of the four cluster groups consist of four to six classroom teachers depending on the size of the classroom enrollment. The participants were volunteers for this project study. The clusters of teachers were named and identified at the onset of the study as a form of record keeping and tracking using an early education theme without personal or geographical biases. Each group included one teacher team leader and three or four teachers (depending on the number of students enrolled) from

each of the preschools located in the same geographical section of the city. The four geographical locations within the city include Central, East, West, and South.

Consideration was given to the ethical commitment required to the improvement of practice by the participants as well as the possible recommendation to conduct a pilot study. A pilot study may better inform the leadership and stakeholders about the financial impact of a countywide project. Gaining access to the participants to conduct observations was not detrimental to them because I had an existing working relationship with them. I have conducted a variety of training and technical assistance in the past. Participants' rights were protected as determined by the state and agency's employee rights. Consent forms were distributed and collected prior to the study, and confidentiality was adhered to through the main office. All participants were protected from harm, as the data being collected were used for the sole purpose of informing the study for program improvement.

The materials utilized for this project study include signed consents, note taking materials, audio recorder, digital camera, and a video recorder. The data were collected from observations and interviews using a smart pen and/or video camera. Meeting observations were recorded on a matrix developed to organize the notes for the study reflections and conclusions. Some documentation, such as meeting minutes or staff development records, was reviewed. The data were collected by me at each of the bi-monthly meetings and interviews which took place in the participating classrooms through a rotation basis. The children were not present during any of the meetings. The field notes and other data collected from this study were maintained in a locked file in my

office. An electronic filing system using Microsoft Office Professional (2007) software was used to store and back up raw notes for analysis. A master outline was created to capture the domains and any relationships within and between each of the domains (Hatch, 2002). I transcribed the data and applied a member-checking strategy as a method to control quality (Creswell, 2003).

I am a program development specialist at the grantee level (county rather than district) who monitors delegate agencies (school districts and nonprofits) as well as direct service Head Start and state preschool programs for quality and compliance to the Head Start Program Performance Standards and other local regulations. I am responsible for identifying strategies that continuously improve program quality including positive child outcomes. The participants knew my role and, as mentioned, had an existing working relationship with me.

Analyzing the raw material required critical decision making on my part to determine the value of the data collected from this study. This qualitative research process of data analysis warranted deliberate choices about the underpinnings of my work (Briggs & Coleman, 2007). The key elements of the data collection and analysis process skills included flexibility, creativity, and intuition, as described by Briggs and Coleman, (2007). Therefore, the analysis process was reflective, interactive, and interconnected.

Data Collection/Instruments & Materials

Data collection instruments included using a smartpen and dot paper journals for the purpose of recording, organizing, and evaluating the data.

Data collection materials used in this study included artifacts such as meeting agendas, sign-in sheets, calendars, classroom configurations, daily schedules, school site plans, parent involvement plans, professional development agendas, school site committee agendas, district assessments, assessment procedures, assessment tools, curriculum, supplemental curriculum, observation methods, and classroom teaching strategies. In addition to the artifacts, other methods included interviews and observations. I conducted 30-40 minute interviews once with each participant. The questions for the interviews focused mainly on meanings and frameworks in order to understand the processes of teacher collaboration as well as determine the quality of the collaborative experiences within the professional learning communities (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). According to Merriam (2002), the primary sources of data collection in a qualitative study are observation, interviews, and documents. Creswell, (2007) also noted that in-depth data collection of these same items. In designing a framework for organizing the data, I concentrated on the research questions that guided this study. I developed a matrix to organize the interview responses with the research questions. Some open-ended questions were asked with follow-up, probing questions. The observation protocols were used to conduct teacher observations and cluster meeting observations. A checklist was implemented for cross checking and to serve as a backup for identifying

questions that may have been inadvertently missed. The rationale for using observations, interviews and artifacts was to capture the scope of the daily life in the classrooms.

Data collection files including the consents were kept electronically, as well as in paper form. Electronic files have been password protected and paper files secured for confidentiality. Data collected from teachers and school sites were categorized according to their PLC group. A separate category was created for the administrative and leadership teams.

Data Collection Results

The process by which data were gathered and recorded to study PLCs in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program was planned with the intention to investigate what was happening at this local Unified School District (USD) in regards to professional development (RQ 1), and how the results from this data could inform me as to what needs to happen in a broader scale (RQ 2). I began collecting data during a meeting with the Early Childhood Education Coordinator at the main office. Having given consent, the meeting was documented and recorded. The coordinator provided an overview of the staff development plan for the school year beginning with the staff orientation which takes place before the children arrive for the first day of school through the last staff activity which takes place in May.

At the end of each school year, the instructional staff complete a survey based on their analysis of how the previous school year went in regards to professional development. From those results and from the results of other evaluations, a yearlong plan for professional development is created. During orientation each year, staff members

receive mandated training such as Child Abuse Reporting, etc., as well as information regarding their PLCs. In previous years, the clusters were determined solely according to their geographical locations, and the teachers within the cluster groups voted on a team leader. Based on the structure of the PLCs, the coordinator has since deemed it necessary to assign the team members as well as the team leaders. The reasoning behind this need for assigning specific teachers to specific teams was due to the fact that one cluster included all veteran teachers while another cluster included all new teachers. Therefore, the level of teacher experience and the culture of the groups became imbalanced. Furthermore, the personalities and relationships of the teachers had to be given consideration because PLCs are a collaborative process, it was crucial to ensure the teams would be successful and productive.

Aside from the development and composition of the clusters, the coordinator was faced with another challenge this year. In previous years, the agency was budgeted to have substitute teachers in the classrooms on Wednesdays so the teachers could have the time to work in their PLCs and attend professional development, as well as conduct parent-teacher conferences and home visits. This year, the ECE program's budget was severely cut, and the substitutes were no longer provided for the purpose of staff development. This resulted in the need for a strategic and creative plan to ensure professional development and the continuation of PLCs.

At the beginning of the school year, the staff members decided regardless of the budget cuts, they would continue with their PLCs through phone calls, emails, and monthly staff meetings. After a few short months, one of the teachers requested a meeting

with the program coordinator. During the meeting, the teacher informed the leadership of the level of stress and anxiety placed on the teachers due to a lack of their routine PLCs. The teachers were feeling isolated and excluded. They wanted their cluster groups to be able to meet in person on a regular basis because when they were actively and personally involved in their clusters, they were learning, and they were providing a higher standard of teaching strategies to the classroom.

Earlier this year, the leadership team and the staff created a plan for professional development that included opportunities to meet in their cluster groups even if it meant meeting on their own time. This dedicated group of teachers was attending staff development and PLCs once a month. To accomplish this, the agency agreed to provide an additional two hours of pay for attending the staff development. Time for networking and PLCs was provided during the time from when the children left for the day and the start of the staff development meeting which ran from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Since most of the staff development days were planned on days when the children were not present, the teachers were able to conduct their normal planning business. However, this was not the case for all teachers. Some of them had to wait for their children to be picked up before they could attend the meetings. This plan was carried out to the end of the year and proved to assist the teachers while at the same time relieving some of the stress and anxiety caused by isolationism and a lack of planning time. Many of the teachers spoke about this in their interviews. Having overcome these challenges, the leadership team and the staff members were able to make some adjustments and adapt to the changes.

The first individual meeting with the coordinator took place at the ECE Office to schedule the dates for meeting the participants and surveying and interviewing the teachers and administrative staff. It was during this meeting that the aforementioned challenges were described. At the conclusion of this meeting, a matrix was used to determine the availability of the participants as well as the locations of the preschool sites. The matrix was color coded determining the type of preschool program (Head Start or State Preschool), program schedule (full day or part day), and geographical location. The geographical location was mainly used for the purpose of visiting the centers and conducting interviews within a specific area rather than driving all around the city. The school district calendar and staff development schedule was also used. The school calendar provided information regarding days of operation, and the staff development schedule was used to plan interviews and observations without disrupting the regular classroom teaching routines or teachers' personal schedules. The school district map was used to better understand the geographical locations of the centers and the teachers working at those centers along with the telephone numbers of the schools to contact the teachers directly. Prior to visiting the schools, I called the teachers to check their availability and plan accordingly.

The gathering of data began after receiving the consent forms. The next process of collecting the data began with a personal introduction and description of the study which took place at a staff development meeting. The background information for the study was shared and the procedures for participating in the study were explained. The research study consent forms were sent electronically ahead of time and personally handed out

during the introduction for those individuals that were interested in an extra copy. The audience at the time of my introduction included individuals that were participating in the first portion of the meeting.

During this first look at the overall structure and participation level at the staff development meeting, it was obvious the staff were familiar with this setting. The meeting room was divided into four sections with extra chairs around the perimeter of the room. Each of the four sections was identified by the presence of a PLC mascot. Children's work and school information was creatively displayed on the walls with fresh bulletin board paper and educational boarders. The atmosphere in the room gave the impression that the focal point for this meeting was on educator's professional development. At the front of the room, a laptop was set up with a projector, and handouts and other information that was prepared ahead of time was on the table. Sign in sheets were placed near the entrance along with other supplies and materials for the teachers to pick up and take back to their individual schools. A row of covered tables was set up in the far corner of the room where teachers brought in food and drinks to enjoy throughout the meeting. This added feature appeared to be the conversation starter as the attendees approached the food tables after a full day of work.

The first portion of the meeting was devoted to the PLCs. At first glance, the collaboration looked weak as some of the participants were away from the groups while others simply were not in attendance. This was not a huge concern at the time because this was the first observation and my presence most likely impacted the regular PLC routine. However, this was not the case for one of the clusters as they were fully engaged

in their business. They appeared to be sharing and comparing examples of curriculum planning strategies that worked for their children. As time went on, the other groups formed and began their planning processes.

At the start of the staff development portion of the meeting, the program coordinator shared a few updates and reminders. Other staff presented their updates as well. One of the PLC clusters presented a literacy activity with handouts, templates, and other related materials for the whole group of teachers. Following the school business portion of the meeting, the literacy coach began the staff development. The teachers turned in “homework” from the previous staff development training, and the coach distributed the handouts for the current training. The participants were attentive and eager to share. Throughout the training exercises, the teachers remained in their PLC clusters and conducted discussions in their groups when instructed by the coach. Each cluster had a reporter who shared their discussions with the group. The level of professionalism was admirable even though there was an ever presence of humor from beginning to end. This was a time that appeared to be enjoyable by all. The time flew by as the participants were absorbing the material and discussing implementation. Many of the teachers commented on the lack of time to get everything accomplished, but enjoyed the time they had to be together.

As the teachers exited the room, a few personal conversations and interactions including questions and comments regarding the study took place. At the conclusion of the meeting, photos were taken of artifacts such as the PLC meeting mascots, which assisted with coordinating the process of interviewing the teachers.

Over the next several months, observations and interviews were carried out according to the schedule. The staff development meetings (including PLCs) took place on Mondays once per month. I attended four of the monthly staff development meetings. Like the initial meeting, each of the staff development meetings included specific training directly related to classroom teaching strategies and planning. In addition to the training, all staff members were provided with program updates and cluster presentations. Although the time specifically set aside for PLCs was severely decreased from once per week to once per month, the individual clusters managed to get together during the time allotment prior to each month's staff development meeting as well as spontaneously during the month.

All participating preschool sites were visited and teachers were interviewed in their respective classrooms. Most of the preschool classrooms were housed in portables separated from the elementary or primary school classrooms, or other education centers. Most of the schools had one preschool program; however, a couple of them had two classes. The immediate supervisors for the preschool teachers and their assistants are the principals at the schools. However, the principals are not part of the Early Childhood Education Program, and they do not participate in the regular operations of the ECE Main Office. Although the preschool classrooms were located at various sites with varying supervisors, there were some similarities observed in the environments. Materials such as word walls, calendars, cubbies, and other preschool related supplies were similar. The physical classroom size and accessibility were different as well as the inclusiveness of the preschool staff in relation to the campus staff. Some classrooms were very large in

physical space and others were smaller. The observations of the teachers in their individual classrooms reflected a genuine vested interest in teaching very young children. The interviews of the teachers also reflected their devotion to young children. The data showed the teachers were very knowledgeable, educated, and experienced as well as familiar with the overall operations of the ECE program. All of the participants were familiar with PLCs and were able to articulate how PLCs benefit them from the standpoint of professional development. In addition, they all were able to convey how the children benefit from the teachers' experiences in PLCs. With regards to the benefits of participating in PLCs, the data results varied depending on the cluster participants. For the clusters whose leader kept in contact and were supportive, the data results were positive. For the clusters whose leaders were uncommitted, the data results were negative. During the interview process, two teachers from the same cluster voiced their concern for the lack of quality and participation in their cluster group this year, and both teachers said their cluster leader was not doing her job. Both of these teachers were previous team leaders and expressed a certain standard for a leader to possess in order to successfully lead a PLC cluster. In this case, the data showed that consideration should be given to the leadership skills of the teachers assigned to be cluster leaders. The collaboration process will risk success when the relationship between its members is dysfunctional. Furthermore, the negative stigma within the cluster group will overcome the efforts of the willing participants resulting in resentment towards the program overall. Three of the four PLCs were high functioning and proved to be a beneficial component for professional development as well as higher quality teaching practices. In three of the

four PLCs, the teachers interviewed said they benefited from the collaborations and so did the children. In the cluster where some dysfunction was observed, the teachers stated that in previous years, both the children and the teachers benefited from the PLCs. From their experiences, they know that PLCs work, but they also require work on the part of the participants.

Artifacts were collected and organized for analysis throughout the study. Each PLC was identified with a zoo animal mascot and included a zebra, panda, tiger, and giraffe. The mascots served not only as identifiers for the teams, but also as a humorous attraction that gave spirit to the teams. Whenever the cluster groups came together, their mascot was placed at the center of their group. Aside from the mascots, documents were reviewed to determine a relationship between what was really happening as a result of PLCs and what was documented from previous year's PLCs when the teachers' collaborations were more frequent. The data results showed that the reduced days for professional development impacted the overall PLC process. However, there was no evidence that this reduction completely disrupted the collaborative efforts on the part of all four cluster groups. Depending on the tenure of the teachers, previous years' experiences with PLCs has helped with this year's challenges. The greatest challenge shared was that teachers were expected to operate at a high quality rate as in previous years, with less time, less support, and (for some) pre-constructed teams. Some of the veteran teachers had been part of a PLC that was successful for three years, and they formed real friendships during those meetings and experiences.

A review of past PLC documentation such as cluster minutes, leadership team minutes, etc., in comparison with this year's documentation provided interesting results. In the past, there was a comprehensive record of all the PLCs meetings as well as all of the leadership team meetings (included the program coordinator) indicating how the team leaders brought the cluster results to the attention of the leadership. From the minutes of the leadership team meetings, there was an ongoing record of support plans and resources to communicate back to the cluster teams. Also included was documentation to show that there were times when the program coordinator provided personal support to the PLCs. This year's documentation continued to be completed as in previous years; however, the leadership team meetings were taking place less frequently. The support and resources from the main office was being provided through email, phone calls, and personal visits. Any spare time for meetings was primarily saved for the professional development meetings once a month. Leadership meetings took place as necessary.

In an effort to concentrate on the guiding research questions, it was imperative to review as much documentation as possible, observe the processes carefully, and talk to all of the participants involved in the study. Using the data collected from the documentation along with the data collected from the observations of the meetings, training, and classrooms visits, and interviews, as well as the artifacts, I was able to complete the data collection and organize the data in preparation for the analysis.

Data Analysis

This project study was an analytic model; however, the characteristics of inductive data analysis were implemented in the process of constructing a picture of the

professional learning communities at work. Results from this process were grounded in the data from the ground up (Hatch, 2002). Checkpoints, as those described by Janesick, (2004) for data analysis included: identifying empirical assertions, participant quotes and vignettes, references to documents, communication, theoretical discussion, and peer review. To assist with validity I applied triangulation and member checking (Creswell, 2007). Triangulation is a qualitative interviewing technique in which the researcher uses verification or extension from other sources (Hatch, 2002). I relied on extensions from other sources such as observations and document reviews to verify the interviews. As the interviews progressed, common themes emerged consistent with observations and previous interview responses, which supported further verification. As previously noted, during the data collection, a colleague verified my observations by comparing anecdotes, reflective thoughts, and checking document reviews.

During the data analysis process, I detected themes, trends and patterns as they emerged and as they did, and I began to realize the presence of the cultural themes within the groups. The data were coded and categorized similar to what was learned from the review of the literature, and the findings are presented in narrative form. In order to code and categorize the data, I reviewed the data continually to identify themes or domains. I created a chart to identify similarities in the data and assigned a number for each theme identified. Unidentified data were separated for consideration later. From this point, I was able to make references from the coded data in order to identify and record relationships and relevancies that would answer the guiding research questions.

Summary of Data Analysis Results

The explanation and interpretation of the data analysis derived from reflective journaling, the matrix system, and logs of notes taken from auditory and smartpen recordings. Patterns emerged during the interviews and surveys that support the findings for this qualitative study and were tracked and coded according to the level of support the data was in relation to the research questions. The coding process (a numerical assignment of numbers) was used with the data collection and analysis of the interviews to ensure anonymity; however, specific responses are further detailed in the appendices.

To ensure the best possible quality and accuracy of the data analysis, triangulation, and researcher clarification was used. Cross checks ensured all participants were represented, and all surveys were received and analyzed. Triangulation was used for clarification and determining connections of the themes. The raw notes from the data analysis have been stored in a locked file as well as electronically protected by password. Audio recordings have been stored electronically and password protected.

To begin to summarize the data analysis, the results of the interviews and surveys were converted into tables. The teacher participants were interviewed in their classrooms, and as the data were collected and categorized, seven commonalities emerged. Table 1 illustrates commonalities in teacher responses regarding their opportunities to increase learning through professional development.

Table 1

Commonalities for Teachers' Increased Learning

Modalities	Description
Training opportunities	Monthly staff development meetings, professional workshops, and professional conferences.
Teacher meetings	Weekly meetings have an advantage over monthly staff development because new ideas and strategies are implemented in the classroom more quickly, which increases opportunities to reflect and improve.
Collaborations	Builds on strengths, culture, trust, and empowerment.
Experience	Early childhood education and adult learning.
Observation	Visiting other classrooms and observing other teachers' instructional strategies makes it easier to see how to implement the same curriculum in different ways.
Coaching	Serves as a support by way of positive feedback, encouragement, and filling in for the teacher allowing other classroom observation visits.
Modifications	Data analysis is completed by administrative team and changes are implemented by the teachers. More time is needed for data analysis and reflective planning.

In the modality section titled “Modifications”, there is a heightened awareness noted concerning a weakness in regards to one of the processes that should be taking place during PLC meetings. The modifications are described as teachers being charged with an implementation task rather than being involved in collaboration and continuous program improvement that increasing teaching and learning. The analysis results indicate that according to the teachers, the administrative team is conducting the data analysis and the teachers are implementing the changes. The analysis of this data is further explored in conjunction with the survey responses.

The other six modalities listed in the table were consistent with the results of the leadership interviews and surveys, as well as the findings from the literature review.

Data was collected from the interviews and observations of meetings to determine how children benefit from the PLCs. Table E2 illustrates common descriptions of these benefits.

Table 2

Benefits to children's learning and school readiness skills

Modalities	Benefits
Teaching strategies	Speeds up the learning process as teachers implement a variety of strategies learned from other teachers that would not have been learned on their own.
Classroom activities	New activities capture the curiosity and create excitement in the children.
Individualization	Strategic lessons and experiences are generated based on knowledge gained from other teacher's experiences with children, families, and community collaborations.
Assessment	Data is reviewed individually and collectively. Interpretations are collectively addressed and modifications are made.

During the analysis of the data regarding benefits to children's learning and school readiness, teaching strategies, classroom activities, and individualization were all consistent with the data collected from observations and the review of the literature. However, further analysis was completed in regards to assessment due to the fact that modifications are mentioned in the description for assessment. Table 2 shows the teachers stated the data from the assessments is reviewed individually and collectively.

Interpretations are collectively addressed and modifications are made. This contradicts the data illustrated in Table 1.

Table 3 represents the results of the teacher surveys in a quantitated format. The shaded areas of the table represent the categories in which the highest number of responses was made.

Table 3

Survey Responses

Question	Definitely agree	Agree	Disagree	Definitely disagree
1. I complete weekly lesson plans based on ongoing observations of my students	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxx	x	
2. I incorporate my students' assessment results into my weekly lesson plans	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxxx		x
3. I receive computer generated reports of students' assessment results	xxx	xxxxxxx	xxx	xxx
4. I currently analyze computer generated reports of my students' assessment results	xxxx	xxx	xxxxxx	xxx
5. I work with other teachers and receive feedback when creating lesson plans	xxxxxxx	xxxxxxx		xx
6. I feel I am given adequate time for analyzing reports, planning lessons, and reviewing ILP goals	xxxxx	xxxxxxx	xxx	xxx
7. Having an opportunity to network with other teachers for the purpose of planning is something that interest me	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxxx		x
8. I feel I would have something to contribute to a teacher planning cluster	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxx		x
9. I need more help with implementing Individualized Learning Plans/Goals (ILP goals)		xxxxxxx xxx	xxxx	xx
10. Visiting other preschool sites is something I would be interested in	xxxxxxxxxxxx xx	x	x	

From the data illustrated in the table, there is one category in which the majority of the participants responded they disagree, and that is Question 4; I currently analyze computer generated reports of my students' assessment results. This result confirms the

data illustrated in Table 2; however, it further contradicts the data illustrated in Table 1. There is a concern regarding the responses for Question 3; I receive computer generated reports of students' assessment results. The concern is that the majority of the teachers are stating that they receive these reports; however, they do not use them for the purpose of modifying methods of instruction to increase children's learning.

Another common theme not listed in the tables, but discussed later, emerged from the interviews. Teachers who recently transferred from the elementary school level to the preschool level compared the work of the elementary school teachers and how seriously the PLC concept is taken by all stakeholders at that level. They shared how planning time is built into the school district calendars, and teachers can count on having PLC meetings and support continually. These preschool teachers unanimously expressed a desire for the same support through ECE PLC implementation because they know it works.

The outcomes of the data analysis demonstrate a relationship to the problem of teachers being challenged with contributing to closing of the achievement gap in the formative years as well as improving school readiness skills. Given the opportunity to review assessment results and analyze the data for the purpose of reflecting on teaching practices and curriculum implementation to assist them in increasing children's learning and readiness skills, PLCs would be the venue for making that happen.

The findings from this analysis also provide support for the guiding research questions. This is discussed in another section.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, Delimitations

Assumptions

Although the research study investigated the impact of learning by teachers as a means of professional development to improve and increase student outcomes in early childhood education, the accuracy of increased student outcomes needs to be further explored. This qualitative case study approach that included observations of cluster meetings, communication records, and surveys, interviews, and outcomes data presented a way to make interpretations of the data. The data have been organized so that it could be compared and contrasted to the research literature. Intentional teaching strategies have been explored through examination of documented classroom observations and environmental rating scales.

Limitations and Scope

At the time of this study, I was not interested in how often PLCs effect staff development and student achievement. My intent was to learn what's going on at the local USD with regards to professional development and how I can create a professional development plan that is meaningful to the teachers in preschool programs at the county level. The results of this study were confined to the process of learning new systems and tools for the purpose of continuous improvement and positive outcomes.

Delimitations

Information has been analyzed from pre and post data contained in the agency's database. Because this study involved multiple sites, opportunities to compare and contrast within the agency was not limited.

Overall Goals

The movement towards accountability has forced many Head Start programs to consider how to better analyze data to inform curriculum planning. Several Head Start and state preschool programs were experiencing challenges with supporting teachers in data analysis and effectively linking their assessment efforts to the Head Start Outcomes Framework (Grisham-Brown, Hallam, & Brookshire, 2006). This study informs stakeholders, other early childhood education programs, and the community how to improve positive student outcomes by creating social change and a more comprehensive and meaningful form of professional development.

Conclusion

The outcomes of this project study fulfill the mission and vision of the local County Office of Education (COE), which is to ensure the success of all students through extraordinary service, support, and partnerships. The vision of this local COE is to be a collaborative organization characterized by the highest quality employees providing leadership, programs and services to school districts, schools and students countywide.

The outcomes of this project study also demonstrates the commitment to the core values of this local COE, which includes, building relationships that promote trust, engaging in open and honest communication, and focusing on the needs of students and children.

Teachers must be called upon to be contributing members of a collective effort to improve student achievement as described by Eaker, Eaker, & DuFour, (2002). Collaborative teaching teams work to examine practices, analyze child outcomes, draw

conclusions, and support/share strategies and ideas that they may not otherwise have been able to accomplish by working alone (Eaker, Eaker, & DuFour, 2002; Schmoker, 2006). Teachers continually develop a sense of purpose as they reflect and communicate together (Weinbalm, et.al. 2004).

Social change results through teacher-inquiry as a form of professional development inclusive of reflective practice and social constructs. Dana & Yendol-Silva (2003) state "...the teacher develops a sense of ownership in the knowledge constructed, and this sense of ownership heavily contributes to the possibilities for real change to take place in the classroom" (p. 6). Participation in PLCs allows the teachers to develop ownership without isolationism.

This project study reforms practice and leads the way for other early childhood education practitioners to examine and consider a similar strategic method of program improvement in the context of reframed learning through professional development.

The following section will provide the description and goals, rationale, a review of educational research and theory, needed resources, implementation plan, project evaluation plan and implications for social change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction to the Project

This section will provide an in-depth description of Professional Learning Communities in Early Childhood Education as a process towards building capacity and increasing professional development for early educators. A local Unified School District's (USD) Early Childhood Education program's implementation of Professional Learning Communities, also known as "Animal Clusters" was studied in relation to the existing problem.

The guiding research questions were developed to address the problem, and the results from this project are reflected in this section.

Question 1: What is happening in regards to professional development in early childhood education programs at a local school district in Southern California?

Question 2: How can the results of this analysis inform me as to what needs to happen in a broader scale at the county level?

Description and Goals

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in Early Childhood Education (ECE) will create a collaborative culture with a focus on learning. The goal was to build capacity and create an environment that removes itself from the task oriented concepts behind isolationism. PLCs are collaborative teams focused on learning and continuously improving the quality of the program (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). The goal for this project study was to investigate and determine how to implement a similar professional development plan in early childhood education programs in a countywide program.

Question 1

What is happening in regards to professional development in early childhood education programs at a local school district in Southern California?

Response to Question 1

A professional development plan which includes the implementation of PLCs in ECE programs has created a pathway to increased teachers' learning and professional growth by building on the strengths of all of the members. This was evidenced through teacher interviews, observations, and surveys. The teacher interviews provided the connection between their learning processes and an increase in the level of intentional teaching strategies used in the classrooms. For example, the majority of the teachers provided detailed explanations of the benefits of PLCs in regards to their personal and professional involvement as well as the children's abilities to meet higher expectations due to the increased knowledge teachers received from one another. A common theme resulting from the interviews was everyone in the PLC was given an opportunity to contribute to the betterment of the whole. None of the teachers claim to have the "perfect" ideas that the rest of the group followed. In fact, all of the teachers interviewed shared how PLCs allow teachers to learn different ways in which to implement the same curriculum and exchange ideas which leads to a sense of gratification. Many of the teachers said that getting together with the team and knowing that other teachers are going through the same things is not only helpful, but also provides a sense of relief. Sometimes teachers become narrow minded and unable to see things differently, so the

team helps to broaden each other's perspectives and improve teaching strategies. From the observations and records of the team meetings, the collaborative efforts that take place within the PLC meetings provide a wealth of information on instructional strategies and activities because other teachers in the group have tried some sort of strategy that worked, and they share the process.

During a PLC meeting, a group of teachers created a tool (cheat sheet) to help with completing the assessments on the children. The tool was successfully implemented and as a result shared with all the other PLCs during a staff development meeting. The teachers increased their learning and the effectiveness of the tool resulted in the teachers having more time to spend reflecting and understanding the children's level of achievement.

PLCs increased opportunities for reflective thought processes because everyone involved in the cluster group is accountable for an attribute to the team. All of the administrators interviewed confirmed this. Both administrators and teachers spoke about how each teacher has their individual instructional strategies and how sharing with the group is productive and creates an outlet for emotional stress. The PLC meetings are a place where teachers can share challenges and learn how other teachers have experienced the same things. Within the culture of the individual groups, an element of mental health therapy was taking place. Some of the teachers specifically mentioned how some meetings turn into venting sessions, and they appreciate the opportunity to do that every once in a while without risk. However, the teachers also shared that there was always someone in the group (usually the leader) that would bring the meeting back to the

agenda and provide encouragement and support to the participants. The data collected from the interviews and the meeting records showed that each team meeting is structured the same; however, according to the interviews, the majority of the teachers said the actual processes that take place may differ. The teachers never really know what will come up during the meeting. All participants agreed there is an accountability piece; the teachers have to come to the meetings with a focus on learning, and they have to come prepared to share something that has worked for them, but they know the meetings with their peers are a safe place to talk. Each of the cluster groups has established their own meeting norms and outcomes.

PLCs impacted positive social change in teaching behaviors by providing teachers with opportunities to view themselves as a unit and depend on each other for dialog and collaboration in an environment where they can support each other and look to each other for answers. During the interviews, most teachers agreed about having the opportunity to ask questions they have always wanted to ask but were afraid to risk being ostracized. For the most part, the teachers and administrators agreed that no one individual is known for their strengths; instead, everybody has something to bring to the team, which builds a positive culture of learning to the workplace. Few teachers indicated situations where team members demonstrated dominance over others. For instances such as these, the administrators re-evaluated the composition of the teams and created a plan of action to support the integrity and the purpose of the positive culture within the teams.

The PLCs in this study originated with the same understanding about how young children learn, and that is, children learn by doing. Therefore, the PLCs in this district

were developed with the same concept in mind; only for adult learners. Because children learn through active exploration of the world around them, and they learn through play, teachers intentionally plan activities and materials to meet the children's needs and abilities. Participation in the PLCs allows teachers to be actively engaged in the process of learning from other teachers as well as experiencing the process of teaching other teachers. This emphasis on learning by doing through collaboration and building capacity was identified throughout the study and in the literature as a logical and practical way to increase professional development and further increase future student outcomes and school readiness.

Professional development is critical to ensuring that teachers are kept abreast of changes in statewide standards and become familiar with new methods of teaching (Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007). Professional development is critical to the culture of the program as well. All of the data collected showed teachers generally enjoy professional development opportunities with other teachers. This is a time when they could network and refresh their knowledge. With California state budget cuts continually looming over the field of education, professional development opportunities are lessening. Hence, opportunities to develop and implement a professional development plan in the form of PLCs.

Question 2

How can the results of this analysis inform me as to what needs to happen in a broader scale at the county level?

Response to Question 2

The results of the data analysis from this study of PLCs in ECE has demonstrated there are a number of things that need to happen in a broader scale in order to implement this form of professional development plan countywide.

First and foremost, the administrative leadership team had to come to an understanding that improvement of any kind would not happen until they began to work cooperatively with the instructional staff to oversee and improve instructional quality in a genuinely and meaningfully way (Schmoker, 2006). This was demonstrated by the leadership team at the USD in this study. The monthly staff development meetings included training for the instructional staff by the instructional staff and the leadership team. The relationship between the instructional staff and the leadership team was truly a working relationship focused on results and learning from the results. The program coordinator was present and involved as a participant in the training. The dynamics of the relationships clearly demonstrated strong levels of trust, cooperation, and respect. This working relationship will be the foundation from which the project will emerge.

The PLC Conceptual Framework (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002) was the focal point for the project. Likened to the building blocks used by the USD, PLCs on a broader scale would base decisions on the following four questions:

“Why do we exist?” It challenges each member of the group to clarify the fundamental purpose of the school... “What kind of school do we hope to become?” The group is called upon to articulate a realistic, credible, desirable future that is so compelling they will be motivated to work

together to make that future a reality...”how must we behave in order to create the kind of school we hope to become?” This...represents the essential ABCs of school improvement... “What steps are we going to take and when will we take them?” The goal...challenges school personnel to transform the good intentions of their vision statement into specific targets to be achieved at different stages of the improvement process. (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002, pp.3, 4)

The formation of the PLC clusters for the project would be determined according to geographical locations and the education and skills of the teachers within the groups. At the local USD, there were four clusters. At the county level there would be at least 10. The data from this study confirmed the capacity size of each cluster worked well. Therefore, one teacher leader and four teachers should be combined for each of the PLCs in the project.

As a result of the monthly meetings, the PLCs accomplished what they set out to do. They were focused on the results, and the team leaders kept record of the meetings. The data showed that in past years, the target updates with the leadership team were most beneficial. During these meetings, the team leaders personally communicated with the administration the efforts and accomplishments of the PLCs. In addition, the team leaders listened to others during the target updates and relayed that information back to the cluster group. Following the target update meetings, the leadership team analyzed and reflected

upon the results of the meeting and completed the necessary follow up to ensure the goals of the program are met.

Rationale

The rationale for implementing professional learning communities in early childhood education was fundamentally based on the problem of teachers teaching in isolation. Most public preschools are located on elementary school campuses and are not considered part of the elementary school. Preschool teachers are not always privy to half day or full day planning sessions that are built into the elementary schools' calendars. K-12 teachers are given opportunities to collaborate with other teachers whom they share grade levels. These teachers do not have to remain inside their classrooms guessing or assuming how to teach or what to do to improve children's knowledge. In public preschool, the typical teacher is the only preschool teacher on campus, and if she has another preschool colleague, they find it difficult to meet together without a planned schedule. If more preschools built in planning days for the teachers, they would have time to participate in PLCs on a regular basis and visit other preschool classrooms to see other teachers in action resulting in student achievement.

Review of Educational Research and Theory

There has been an increase in research and theory on professional learning communities over the past few years. More teachers are engaged in collaborative efforts for the purpose of improving education by tapping into the people who are nearest to the services. However, collaborative efforts are not the know all and end all to PLCs. Collaboration should be ongoing and continual over periods of time (Lieberman &

Pointer Mace, 2009). High quality professional development should be ongoing and continual in order for reflection to impact the development of teaching and learning. In an article by Kitchenham (2008), transformative learning theory, which has to do with adult learners, is inclusive of two elements; critical reflection or self-reflection and critical discourse. This theory begins with a perceptive transformation and a frame of reference (Kitchenham, 2008).

Adults have acquired a coherent body of experience, associations, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses, frames of reference that define their life world. Frames of reference are the structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings. They set our “line of action.” (Mezirow, 1997 p.5)

Once this “line of action,” described by Mezirow (1997, p.5) is set, adults have difficulty accepting ideas that are not part of their preconceived ideas or “frame of reference”.

A frame of reference encompasses cognitive, conative, and emotional components, and is composed of two dimensions: habits of mind and a point of view. Habits of mind are broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes. These codes may be cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological. Habits of mind become articulated in a specific point of view—the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation. (Mezirow, 1997 p.5)

The transformation process occurs when a person reflects on their beliefs and considers new ideas and concepts. Professional learning communities may potentially support transformation (Jacobs & Yendol-Hoppey, 2010). In PLCs, teachers are focused on learning something new or gaining information that would improve their knowledge. When preschool teachers are isolated from one another and only come together for a workshop or two throughout the year, they strengthen their “*frame of reference*” and “*habits of mind*” theorized by Mezirow (1997). In order for teachers to move beyond their habits, they need to experience the transformation process. This transformation process can also be related to a cultural shift from traditional practices to collaborative efforts. The most critical shift that must take place is for the teacher to be able to mindfully move from a primary focus of teaching to learning (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002).

Needed Resources & Implementation Plan

Potential Resources and Existing Support

The most significantly noted resources needed to implement PLCs in this study include relationships among participants and environmental factors; both of which require contribution from the stakeholders (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). However, a contribution does not mean it is the stakeholders’ responsibilities to implement PLCs. Teachers have come together on their own to demonstrate the power of collaboration where most teachers continue to work in isolation (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002). The message from the teachers came through loud and clear. They have many responsibilities

and very little time. Because PLCs are a “process” and not a staff development “product”, teachers have to become mindful of the change in their belief system to create a cultural shift or a learning transformation (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1997).

Potential Barriers

Relationships and environmental factors are both available resources; however, these resources are not always easily obtainable and can be potential barriers.

Relationships are built on the foundation of trust. “Professional learning communities are collegial cultures where teachers develop the capacity to engage in honest talk.”

(Lieberman & Miller, 2008 p. 18). Honest talk cannot take place without trust. Therefore, when implementing a PLC, it becomes necessary to create a culture where people care for one another, are considerate towards one another, and where they make extraordinary efforts to provide support and help each other (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002).

Through cultural connections and covenantal relationships the leaders will become successful stewards devoted to building the capacities of the teachers (Sergiovanni, 2005).

The environmental factors that may create barriers for implementation include program calendars (various preschool programs have different calendars), daily schedules (depending on the program and location children attend at different times), and geographical locations. An example of an environmental barrier was realized when the PLCs comprised of teachers from Head Start and others from State preschool experienced difficulty getting together because the State preschool teachers’ children attend school

five days a week, and the mid-day break between sessions did not align with the break between sessions in Head Start.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

As a proposal for implementation of PLCs in early childhood education programs, it was recommended that an understanding of the meaning of collaboration be understood. Building relationships through collaborative efforts is crucial in developing PLCs. It was also recommended that the program focus on their mission, vision, and core values as well as their goals for improving child outcomes. Eaker, DuFour & DuFour (2002) have created a PLC Continuum which includes four stages of development used to assess each of the elements of the PLC. These four stages are: Pre-initiation, Initiation, Developing, and Sustaining (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002).

To initiate the project on a larger scale, I will conduct a meeting with the contact teachers from each of the schools. The contact teachers are the teachers who assume responsibility for the school in the absence of the director. They also serve as the lead teachers. During the staff meeting, we will discuss the project while directly relating it to the mission, vision, and core values of the County Office of Education. We will also address the goals for strengthening teaching strategies to improve child outcomes.

Professional learning communities are a process in which a timetable cannot realistically be assigned. A timetable by way of phases in a process would be better supported and followed. Using a continuum like the one created by Eaker, DuFour & DuFour (2002), four phases could be assigned to timeframes, but not a requirement because of the nature of building relationships and collaboration.

In the study at the local USD in Southern California, the PLCs have been evolving over a period of four years and the process is still developing. Some of the critical components have weakened this year due in part to budget cuts and the removal of staff development days. However, the data clearly demonstrated the participants were continually focused on the PLC Conceptual Framework (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002) as well as their responsibilities to the cultural and covenantal relationships that formed over the years.

Roles and Responsibilities

The PLCs consisted of groups of teachers formed mainly because of their geographical locations. Each teacher group had one teacher leader. The role of the teacher leader was to communicate with the participants in their PLC for the purpose of planning meetings. The teacher leaders developed an agenda, gathered materials, and provided feedback to the PLC and the leadership team. The teacher leaders from each of the PLCs met monthly with the leadership team in the form of another PLC at the leadership level. The teacher participants in the PLCs were responsible for being active participants whose primary objective was to learn from the group and share their perspectives, strategies, and experiences.

Project Evaluation Plan

What Worked, What Didn't

The observation and recording tools used in this study were found to be successful in capturing data from interviews and meetings. The use of the smartpen was a valuable asset for capturing and organizing the data collection. The smartpen provided

supportive documentation on paper as well as electronically. The software in the pen had an option to locate specifics using keywords which proved helpful in data analysis. The surveys played a key role in this study as themes emerged that were reflective of the research. The coordinator of the ECE program was invaluable. She was approachable, sociable, knowledgeable, and supportive to this study.

The most challenging part of this study was the process of scheduling interviews with teachers. Some teachers were very interested in an opportunity to be interviewed and others gave consent but didn't realize that the interview needed to be completed within a timeframe and perhaps were unaware of the importance of their opinions. However, once they began the interview, they became comfortable and willing to share their thoughts. It was almost as though the interview process was personal to them and it captured their attention. The interviews themselves worked well, but the process of scheduling the interviews didn't work as well as planned.

In regards to the project, the collaborations and skill building techniques worked well. When observing the PLCs, the teachers were engaged in the process of sharing information and building relationships. A common theme that emerged from the interviews was the benefits of PLCs for the children. The teachers shared that the children received the knowledge and experience of four or five teachers instead of one. Specific examples were given about how teachers work with underperforming children, children with challenging behaviors, curriculum implementation, and working with parents. Some of the teachers articulated how they learned things from the PLCs that they would never have thought of on their own.

Project Evaluation Plan

A goal-based evaluation plan would be developed for a broad scale implementation of PLCs in early childhood education programs. Preschool teachers are familiar with developing goals and objectives for their children and families, and they are familiar with assessing the progress of those goals through evaluation; therefore, this same approach would be most meaningful and beneficial to determine the progress or regress PLCs generate. The justification for this type of evaluation plan is stemmed from the belief that teachers are more engaged in the improvement process when they are personally involved. An evaluation plan that did not involve the teachers on a personal level may be detrimental to the inner workings of the cultures evolving in all of the PLCs.

The goal-based evaluation plan would be developed in collaboration with the teacher leaders and the leadership team. The platform for the foundation of this plan would be based on the regulations prescribed by the key stakeholders. For example, in this study, the federal and local regulations would provide the platform from which to build the overall evaluation goals.

As previously mentioned, the Head Start Act of 2007 (ACF, 2007) requires that Head Start programs develop a professional development plan in which each Head Start teacher receives 15 hours per year of professional development that is directly related to classroom practices. Head Start programs are responsible for developing the plan with the teachers and tracking the hours of professional development. In addition, the State of California requires that each credentialed early childhood educator develop a professional growth plan and keep track of 105 hours of professional development for each five year

renewal period. Consequently, one of the goals for the project evaluation plan would be to ensure that each of the PLCs complete training directly related to teaching strategies to improve child outcomes.

As previously mentioned, the Head Start Act also requires programs to provide ongoing assessments of children's development, and to analyze data outcomes to plan for improvement through the implementation of individualized learning plans for each of the children in their Head Start program. Therefore, the second goal for the project evaluation plan would be to analyze outcomes data to plan units or lessons for improving children's kindergarten readiness skills.

The third and final goal would be to complete an annual end of year survey to determine what practices or strategies need to be implemented in the following year in order to result in overall program improvement. The overall program improvement portion of the evaluation plan will provide insight to the leadership team and stakeholders as a larger schema for writing grants for funding opportunities.

In conclusion, the project evaluation plan would be completed annually and provide direct results regarding professional development, student achievement, and program improvement.

Implications for Social Change

Local Community

The Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 has captured the attention of the teachers, instructional assistants, and leaders in early childhood education locally as the deadlines for obtaining education and professional development requirements draws near.

Early childhood educators are being held accountable for contributing to closing the achievement gap in the formative years, and they are challenged by all of this.

Professional learning communities support professional development by providing a vessel for transformation from working alone to working in collaboration with others.

“Teachers in professional learning communities learn to go public” (Lieberman & Miller, 2008 p. 24). Teachers learn to speak openly and honestly about the work they do. PLCs offer an alternative to the hoarding and secrecy of teaching strategies and build the capacity of teachers as they make themselves known to the public (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). Teachers in PLCs are empowered to do their best for their students, and they want to help others become successful (Lunenburg, 2010).

Far Reaching

Today’s leaders in education are in the position of taking on diverse architect roles in adult development and collaborative communities (Drago-Serverson, 2007).

Political mandates to improve student learning and instruction have pressured educational leaders to seek innovative practices to meet today’s high standards while building and maintaining relationships with others. Intentional methods of training and developing early childhood education teacher leaders have traditionally included direct approaches such as college degree or certificate programs. This study will provide other scholars in the field with validated research demonstrating an indirect pathway to building the necessary skills to improve student learning and instruction via professional learning communities in early childhood education. All scholarly practitioners and leaders will

benefit from the study. In the long run, the children will benefit from motivated teacher leaders.

This study advances positive social change by demonstrating constructs that not only consider improving child outcomes as an isolated target, but also acknowledges the impact the results have on the societal perceptions of early childhood education in general.

Conclusion

The local Unified School District's Early Childhood Education program has demonstrated a positive impact on professional development through the implementation of professional learning communities. As one of the few early childhood education programs to delve into this process four years ago, the program has become a PLC model for other preschool programs in Southern California. This program has risen to the challenge to contribute to closing the achievement gap as well as enhancing professional development.

The results of this study were reflective of the research and theoretical frameworks for professional learning communities and adult learning. Transformation learning theory (Mezirow, 1997) was predominant throughout the process and continues to be relevant.

The future of PLCs in early childhood education (ECE) programs is limitless. Personal reflections about this project as well as impacts on future research are described in Section 4.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In reflection, the opportunity for teachers to participate in the process of creating and implementing their own professional development by way of professional learning communities is step towards the recognition of preschool teachers as effective and professional educators. For many years, and in some cases still remains, the perception of the preschool teacher being nothing more than an uneducated care taker. Today's preschool teachers are highly educated, and they are shaping the future education of our youngest children in many powerful ways.

When the school district first began to implement PLCs in the ECE program, the focus was primarily on early literacy. The leaders used sales strategies and concepts to get the children ready for kindergarten. They were determined to get the children from low socio-economic status minorities to rise to the level of their expectations. They did not allow the children's low socio-economic status dilute their expectations. The PLCs and peer coaches worked with this focus providing feedback and support to one another. During this study, a father sent an email to the coordinator with a link to a YouTube video. The father recorded his four year old son (a student in Head Start) reading a children's book from cover to cover. The father was overwhelmed with joy about his son's accomplishments. He further continued about how grateful he was to be a parent in the program. The teachers and other staff members at the district created a positive social change in him too. He takes better care of himself, he is involved in his children's education, and he's inspired. This was just one of the many notable success stories

coming out of the district due to the processes by which teachers and other staff were working collaboratively and focused on the students.

After completing the data analysis and writing the results, this project study has proven that indeed, PLCs are the solution to the problems and challenges ECE programs are dealing with when attempting to increase professional development and contribute to closing the achievement gap during the formative years. The pivotal point being a focus on learning becomes the leverage for improved teaching and professional development.

The process by which the school district's ECE program has used to implement PLCs is in alignment with the professional literature and research findings. The process of analyzing the data and witnessing the results was incredibly exciting. The entire concept of PLCs seems so simple; yet so complex. To have read the literature regarding PLCs and to have lived through a study of a program using PLCs has provide the motivation to carry out a PLC project at the county level. The study has become a model for my project as well as for other early childhood education programs to meet the same challenges regarding school readiness and professional development.

Project Strengths & Limitations

There is no limit to the strengths in this project. Observing preschool teachers as professional educators who are passionately embracing PLCs and openly sharing their ideas and strategies has been one of the greatest strengths. Early childhood education has been an easy entry point for unskilled educators in the past. The participants in this study were asked about their education and experience, and several of them shared how they became motivated to obtain master's degrees in early childhood education and others

were moved to preschool from elementary. The former elementary school teachers were very excited to be a part of the preschool, and they were actively learning from their cluster group meetings.

Many of the results lead into other positive outcomes. The participants unanimously support PLCs as an effective process for increasing their teaching skills and to enhance student achievement. The responses from the surveys and interviews revealed that some teachers were not necessarily analyzing computer generated reports; however, as a result of the discussions during the interviews, those teachers wrote notes to share at their next meeting. Almost all of the participants took some sort of notes which demonstrated their interest in improving their practices. All of the participants expressed a desire to attend the meeting where I will share the results of this study.

The teachers were fairly comfortable in their cluster groups and were active in the promotion of professional development regardless of the challenges they faced due to budget restraints and limited staff development days.

During a staff development meeting, one of the PLCs was on the agenda to present a workshop to the other teaching teams for an event called "Literacy Day". The group developed a theme from a book and built curriculum strategies to support early literacy. Each member of the PLC presented something to the group. The audience clearly appreciated the presentation and was provided with samples and templates to use in their classrooms. As a result of this process, one of the PLCs will present a literacy workshop to the rest of the group. This is something that emerged out of the PLC process and demonstrated the possibilities for teacher leadership in early education.

While visiting one of the preschool sites, one of the literacy coaches was there to provide relief to the teacher so she could visit another school and observe another teacher implementing a teaching strategy that she was hoping to improve. During the interviews, this became a common thread that emerged from the teachers. This strength is notable in that the teachers feel safe enough to provide feedback to each other and help each other to improve. This type of relationship based on trust is regularly practiced in the PLCs.

Although the strengths are limitless, there are limitations on the PLC project. When the program first began to implement PLCs, there was enough money designated for hiring substitute teachers so the teachers could conduct half day PLC planning sessions and visit other school sites. They also had the time to attend staff development training. During this past year, the money was cut from the budget and the teachers had to develop another way of implementing PLCs. This proves to be a limitation because the teachers are still being held accountable to student achievement, paperwork, and of course the supervision of the children; however, they lack the resources to conduct the quality of planning they found most valuable in the past.

A review of school district calendars in Southern California identify regular and continual staff development days. Some schools have a minimum day each week and others take full days. The teachers in the K-12 system are actively participating in PLCs and are showing positive results; however, this is happening because they have been allotted this time by their districts.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

Each year, the district has to submit a contract to the grantee with a calendar showing the days of operation. In this calendar, student days are accounted for. Given the requirement of student days, agencies have to insert days for training, holidays, and vacations. A recommendation would be to build planning dates into the yearly calendar just as the K-12 educators have done. A call for support from education leaders, stakeholders, and the community to develop a plan to support PLCs in early childhood education programs is crucial. PLCs hold promise of transforming teaching and learning for both the educators and students in our schools (Lieberman & Miller, 2008, p. 106).

Scholarship

Most of my learning took place during the literature reviews. After researching and reading a vast amount of books and journal articles on PLCs, I realized that the process of building and sustaining PLCs is similar in approach to the way we teach young children. In my earliest research, I read an article by Riley & Roach (2006) addressing an emergent approach to staff development. In that article, the authors asked why preschool teachers aren't taught the way they teach young children; through a process (Riley & Roach, 2006). As I reflected on that throughout the data collection and data analysis, I discovered a direct correlation between PLCs and developmentally appropriate practices for teaching young children. The main idea with both is that the participants learning through meaningful and enjoyable experiences.

Project Development and Evaluation

My learning experience regarding the development of this project was both informative and rewarding. Prior to the development of this project, I was introduced to PLCs and immediately became fascinated with the possibilities implementing something similar at the preschool level. I was fortunate to attend a two day workshop by Richard and Rebecca DuFour, and I was given an invitation to meet with the DuFours over lunch and talk about my work. They encouraged me to continue with my passion to improve child outcomes through PLCs in early childhood education. Attending their workshop and speaking with them personally motivated me to pursue my dream. I referred to their books for guidance in developing this project. The project became even more meaningful when I learned that the DuFours had previously led workshops at the local USD in this study, and some of the preschool staff members attended.

In evaluating this project, I believe there is always room for improvement. There will always be better ways of doing things. This is the first step to bringing the field of early childhood education and staff development to the forefront of the research.

Leadership and Change

There is much to be said about leadership and change in relation to this project study. The results have shown that teaching quality can be improved with continual and supportive staff development. PLCs provide opportunities for both leadership and change due mostly to the teacher's perceptions and frame of mind as they participate in PLCs with a focus on learning. In PLCs, teachers are engaged in stimulating conversations with other teachers sharing ideas and supporting one another by providing and receiving

honest feedback. Through the rich exchanges, teachers are leading other teachers and change is taking place in positive ways. Relationships are critical to developing leadership skills and creating change for the betterment of the children.

Analysis of Self as Scholar, Practitioner & Project Developer

Self as Scholar

Many years ago, I promised myself that I would become a life-long learner. As a child, I loved school, and when I went home, I played school. I didn't have to be the teacher; I was happy being the student. I was not able to attend college right out of high school even though I had a scholarship. I honestly did not know what I won, and no one in my family had ever been to college, so I did what everyone else in the family did, and that was start working. As I worked, I learned. I worked in a bank where I was enrolled in an institute. I excelled, and I became confident. I was promoted, and eventually worked myself out of a paying job to a home making job, and this is where all of my real learning began...with the birth of my daughter. When she was born, I knew I had to go to school in order to figure out what I was supposed to teach her. I knew that was my responsibility. So, I began with early childhood education coursework. When she became preschool age, I went with her and volunteered. From that point on, I have been in school taking classes and eventually teaching both children and adults. I continue to love learning today because it gives me self-confidence. I know that knowledge is something that can never be taken from me, and knowledge is something I can give to others for them to keep. Knowledge is power, and power, when used with good intention is necessary in order to advocate (in my opinion) for the youngest learners in our country.

Early childhood education is a field that lacks in teacher leadership, leadership in general and advocacy for educators.

Through my research and writing efforts, I've made some remarkable progress. I have been able to study the very topics that ignite my passion and fuel my brain with ideas that I never thought possible. I never dreamed I would be able to accomplish a project that would mostly benefit preschool teachers; yet further benefit preschool children and their families. I never dreamed I would be able to make all the necessary connections to deliver my project, but I have, and I will continue to do so because I have confidence.

Oddly enough, while working on this study, I've been attending a leadership academy offered by the County Office of Education. Everything I've been learning through the academy has been directly related to my research and experience with the PLC study project. I have come to appreciate myself as a scholar, and I am passionate about teaching and learning and believe they go hand in hand.

Practitioner

In light of my research, I have changed some of my practices and am more willing to share my pedagogy. In fact, now that I've done all of this sharing and collaborating outside of my daily practice, my colleagues often refer to PLCs as the way to get things done right by the people who know what is needed. In other words, the people who know are those most familiar with the culture of the group. Some of my colleagues have recognized the cultures within various collaborative groups and couldn't wait to tell me about the synergy that resulted. As a professional practitioner, I am finally being

recognized as a leader in early childhood education outside of the agency I work for, and I look forward to informing the literature as well as the preschool community at large.

While at work, I spoke freely to colleagues and shared many of the benefits of my learning experiences. It is rewarding and intriguing to converse with other early educators about something new and innovative in staff development. I find myself framing meetings and trainings with the same strategies found in PLCs. Comparisons from my project to my daily role as a program development specialist are continually running through my mind, and as a result, I find myself “reflecting in action” as Schon (1983, 1987).

As a practitioner, I have come to realize that the actual practice of education really hasn't changed that much. What changed was my attitude towards the practice, and my ability to do something about it. To me, the word “practice” means to do something over and over in an effort to improve. To be a professional practitioner in the field of early childhood education, I believe I must continue my efforts, over and over, of teaching and learning using the PLC concepts developed in my study in an effort to improve programs. I remain open to the ideas of others; I remind myself that no matter what I know, my ideas are not the only “right” ones. They are ideas that need to be combined with the ideas of others to make something good into great.

Project Developer

Through this journey, I have become better equipped to develop and implement PLCs as a form of professional development in early childhood education. I learned how to observe groups of individuals for the purpose of understanding a little about the

relationships they have with each other and with children. I learned the process of developing a project by studying the literature, researching in the field and analyzing the data. I know now that it is not appropriate to dictate staff development by creating a plan based on my knowledge alone. I have learned the importance of collaboration, the development of trust, relationships, and open and honest communication. I have grown as a leader and a project developer. I have learned to appreciate the process of learning that takes place while going through the developing stages of a project. Like the confidence gained as a scholar, I have gained enormous confidence as a project developer. I look forward to the day when I am consulted about PLCs in early childhood education.

As I look to the future, I hope to become more than a consultant. I hope to be in a position where I can meet with education leaders at the national level. I've attended national conferences and listened to leaders speak about current trends in early childhood education. One of these days, I'm going to share current trends coming out of PLCs in early childhood education programs not only for the purpose of increasing teacher quality, but also for increasing the quality of the field. The day has come when preschool teachers are known and respected for being quality educators and not babysitters or daycare providers. Yes, due to the age of the children we serve, care and supervision will always be critical; however, there's a great deal of learning that takes place at a very young age, and it takes special people to get the job done.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

The project's potential impact on social change is demonstrated by the perceptions about early childhood education in general terms. The teachers benefit from

the nurturing relationships within the PLCs, the children benefit from the impact on social change in the teachers, and society as a whole benefits from building community responsibility and leadership.

Over the course of my work in this study, I have witnessed the benefits that teachers receive during their PLC time. I have interviewed the teachers and heard about how PLCs provided comfort to both new and experienced teachers. During an interview, an experienced teacher shared how she felt when she first started teaching preschool. She said she was basically thrown in to the classroom to sink or swim. She didn't have anyone to ask questions or to see how to do things. Since the implementation of PLCs, she has taken it upon herself to make sure new teachers have the support they need to be successful. She added, when the PLC groups were changed by the leadership team, it was due to the fact that one of the groups had too many new teachers and needed a couple of experienced teachers to support them. This not only benefited the new teachers, but as an experienced teacher, she felt recognized for her ability to be a teacher leader. During the staff development meetings, I observed the staff members being sociable and amiable towards one another. This was a genuine and caring community of educators who grew in their relationships through the PLC experiences, staff meetings, sharing of materials as well as potlucks and personal stories.

During an interview, a teacher shared how one of the children in the program not only achieved the goals in their individualized learning plans, but surpassed them. As a result, the parent became more involved in their child's education, and the teacher felt empowered in her leadership skills. She described a change that took place in the parent

which has made an enormous impact on their societal perceptions. In the past, the parent rarely took showers, followed a routine, cared about anyone or anything, but after experiencing the changes in their child as a result of participating in the preschool program, the parent has a daily routine that includes showering, scheduled healthy meals, and respect for others. There are numerous parents with stories like this who have been impacted by positive social change.

When something as positive as a meaningful professional development plan results in better-quality teachers, the children improve. When a school accomplishes its goals for children, families and society benefit. My project has the potential for impact on social change in a broader range. My project's potential is greater due to the number of people that would be exposed to the opportunities and the benefits of increased quality of education, increased knowledge and confidence in children and their families, and increased parent and community involvement.

Implication, Applications, Directions for Future Research

Interventions to improve teacher quality must include improving relationships between teachers and children as well as between teachers and teachers (Domitrovich, et al, 2009). The importance of this work was focused on improving teacher quality by investigating the relationships and the processes within PLCs. The research suggests that instructional practice and the quality of teacher-student relationships is significant in fostering developmental skills and school readiness (Domitrovich, et al, 2009; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006; Pianta, 2003). The results from this study are reflective of the research in that teachers were more comfortable in taking risks at trying new strategies and practices

in the classroom based on feedback received from a peer. The results of their efforts were reflected in the student's achievement which also increased relationships.

Future research into professional development activities, especially in Head Start, is desperately needed. Professional learning communities in combination with mentoring by teacher coaches that spend time in the classroom with teachers and hold follow-up meetings to provide feedback is an important topic for future research. Like the individualization strategies used by teachers in the classroom, professional development must be individualized and personalized as well.

Conclusion

The journey from the beginning of my studies to the end of my project has been challenging at times, however, it was the challenges that provoked my thinking and changed my perceptions over the course of time. Interestingly enough, it all started with a problem. I expected to find comprehensive results for the data collection and analysis process, but I did not expect to receive an overwhelming amount of confirmation related to my personal teaching philosophy and pedagogy. The more I reflect, the more I am able to identify strengths in the project which confirms the theoretical approach to transformative learning. I have learned to focus on strengths and passion rather than weakness or gaps in knowledge. Although I can understand the challenges that leaders face with the state's budget crisis, I cannot help but to consider other ways of helping teachers improve their teaching quality and the quality of education for young children. It is my genuine hope that somehow, someday, leaders, stakeholders and funders can build time into the school calendars to support ongoing and continual professional development

in the form of PLCs because this project has revealed the level of relationship based training and support teachers receive to further increase student achievement.

Through my project study, I have grown into a scholarly researcher and practitioner. My confidence level has risen tremendously. Researching has become a habit, and I have increased my dependency of being aware of current trends in the research. A sense of curiosity from other educators in the field has developed as a result of my work. More people are talking about building capacity, building relationships, building leadership skills, and creating professional learning communities; all of which contribute to positive social change in early childhood education.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Learning Communities

In Early Childhood Education

The Project Objective

To Increase Professional Development for Teachers

And Increase Contributions to Student Achievement

Designed for Preschool Educators

By

Robin Fairfield

July 2011

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Overview of the Project and Research

This PLC Project was developed as a result of a review of the professional literature and a study of Professional Learning Communities in Early Childhood Education by, Robin Fairfield, Walden University.

The Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) Project for preschool programs begins with the development of a conceptual framework (Eaker, DuFour, DuFour, 2002). This project describes the foundation for developing and sustaining PLCs in preschool programs for the purpose of strengthening teaching strategies to effectively contribute to future student achievement. The focus of this PLC Project is on professional development as a method of increasing program quality at the local level to benefit the children and their academic future.

The PLC Project is broken down into five sections as indicated in the table of contents. These include the following:

- *In the Beginning*
- *Teacher Leaders and Management Meetings*
- *Staff Development Meetings*
- *Professional Learning Communities*
- *Monitoring and Support*

Each of the sections requires commitment to developing new ways of communicating and brainstorming ideas towards continuous improvement, but it is important to remember that PLCs are not a set of sequential steps to follow. PLCs are a process of collaboration, learning, and are results oriented. Therefore, this project is being provided for the purpose of sharing a study of

preschool teachers implementing PLCs and maintaining their commitment to teaching and learning while focusing on continuous improvement.

The research is replete with differing contexts of professional learning communities; however, PLCs have long been rooted in the education improvement literature (Bessina, 2006). “Schools that function as professional learning communities are always characterized by a collaborative culture,” (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002, p.5). It is the teachers’ reflection and analysis at the school site or classroom level that becomes the collaborative culture of the PLCs that serve as the driving force for meaningful and sustainable professional development. Each PLC has specific strategies and practices that allow the members to build capacity and engage in open and honest communication (Lieberman & Miller, 2008). Becoming a professional learning community is not a program that leaders can impose on teachers (Garrett, 2010). The teachers are the pillars of the PLCs, leaders and administrators can be supportive to PLCs by allocating funds normally spent on bringing in outside trainers for staff development to funding release time and scheduling for PLC meetings (Garrett, 2010).

This project combines a design framework and implementation allowing the design itself to become the life of the community rather than a precursor to its existence (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

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In the Beginning

As early childhood education (ECE) programs begin to seek an understanding of professional learning communities as a process of professional development, a transformational shift in culture needs to take place (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002). The first thing ECE programs need to do is focus on learning (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002). By concentrating efforts on learning, the staff members gain the knowledge necessary to “address the issues that drive the PLCs” (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002, p. 35). The focus on learning includes educating the staff members on the mission, vision, and goals of the program.

Once the focus on learning has taken place, ECE programs need to begin identifying and acknowledging teacher leaders at the school sites. Programs cannot wait for one person to step up and take responsibility for getting PLCs started. Everyone has to be committed to the mission, vision and goals of the program as well as the time and energy required to participate in collaboration with their peers. Therefore, in addition to beginning with a focus on learning, there has to be a transformational shift in the culture of preschool teachers.

The leadership team identifies the PLC clusters based on geographical locations and the experience and education of the participants. Each cluster consists of one teacher leader and three or four additional teachers. The cluster leader from each of the groups is responsible for facilitating the PLC meetings and participating in the leadership meetings.

Staff development meetings include participation by the PLCs as a means of building capacity with the larger group. During each staff development meeting, one of the PLC clusters present a thematic lesson that other clusters can build upon when planning lessons in their

classrooms. The staff development meetings provide opportunities for all PLC participants to share their experiences and knowledge with others.

Staff Development Meetings

Staff development meetings are an important piece with regards to continuous program improvement. Many teachers enjoy participating in staff development meetings, but they also expect to gain something from the meetings that they can implement in their day to day practices. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. Staff development meetings have to include active participation by the staff members. This can be accomplished by adding the PLC clusters to the agenda for every staff development meeting.

Sample Staff Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome and announcements
2. Literacy Day Plans Presented by PLC team #1
3. Program information
4. Recruitment and Enrollment
5. Parent Survey Results
6. Transition Surveys
7. 2011-2012 Program Year; Calendar, Budget, and Program Goals
8. Staff Development Topic: *Decreasing Inappropriate Behavior – Ignoring and Redirecting*
9. Reminders
10. Adjourn

Teacher Leader and Management Meetings

During each of the professional learning community meetings, the teacher leader is responsible for communicating with the management leadership team. To accomplish this, the teacher leader compiles a target update to present at the teacher leader and management meeting.

Target Update

Directions: Prepare three bullet points of importance to share. One or more concerns you, your team, or program have or additional items for the agenda.



PROGRAM / TEAM / AREA



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

AREAS OF CONCERN OR ADDITIONAL AGENDA ITEMS:

Professional Learning Communities

Together is better...Making PLCs work!

1. Create monthly calendars together.
2. Everyone brings shared reading poems and songs for the theme. Bring sentence strips.
Write them out. Shared reading is done for the entire theme.
3. Check each other's classroom environment for ECERS and other licensing issues.
4. Plan ESL small group lessons for specific small groups.
5. Discuss how daily/weekly/ lesson plans coordinate with assessment results and how this results in differentiated instruction for individual children, small groups and whole group activities and lessons.
6. Discuss how anecdotal notes help guide your decision-making as you write lesson plans.
7. Discuss training from staff development and how it needs to transfer into classroom practice. Help each other with questions or clarification that is needed. Decide on steps to take to further your learning.
8. Discuss ideas for all parts of the Instructional Requirements of the Daily Schedule.
9. Make literacy or learning centers or games for your classrooms.
10. Discuss, write, and help each other with: Assessments, Individual Learning Plans, prepping for Parent/Teacher conferences, other paperwork, etc.

Monitoring and Support

Monitoring and support are critical components of effective professional learning communities.

PLC Feedback Sheet

Cluster: _____ Date: _____

Teachers present:

Purpose(s) / Objectives of the meeting:

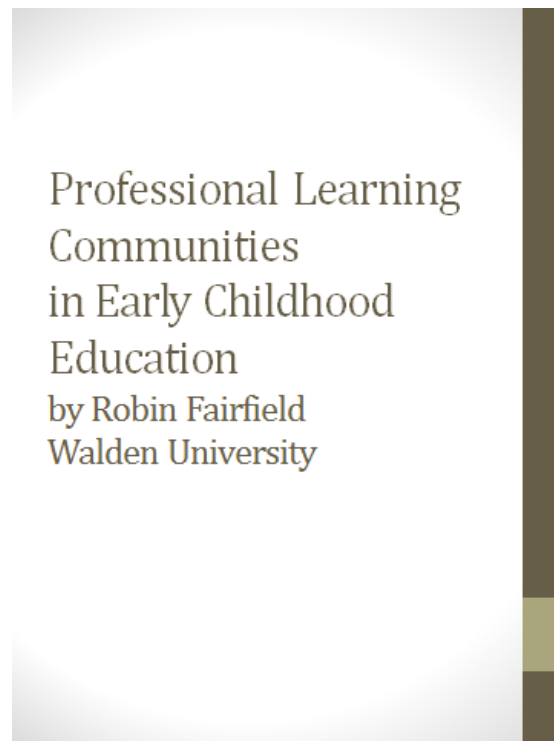
Agenda Items:

Actions / Outcomes:

Questions / Concerns:

Other:

The Project Presentation



PLC Framework (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002)

Conceptual Framework

- Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals
- Developing High Performing, Collaborative Teams
- Cultural Shifts
- Planning, Time, Priorities
- Focus on Child Outcomes
- Continuous Improvement

Preschool Teams

GIRAFFE Cluster 1	PANDA Cluster 2	ZEBRA Cluster 3	TIGER Cluster 4
Team Leader*	Team Leader*	Team Leader*	Team Leader*
Casa Blanca SP	Mt. View SP*	Highgrove HS/SP	Grant Full Day SP
EOC SP	Pachappa SP	Highland HS/SP	Magnolia SP
Hawthorn e HS/SP*	Liberty HS/SP	Longfello w HS	Fremont HS/SP
<small>location</small> Jackson SP	Jefferson SP	Emerson SP*	Beatty HS/SP
Sunshine HS/SP	Jefferson HS	Longfello w SP	Monroe SP*

Monthly Meetings

- Create monthly calendars together
- Shared reading poems and songs for the themes
- Sentence strips
- Visit each other's classroom environments
- Plan small group lessons
- Discuss daily/weekly lesson plans
- Coordinate DRSP-PS results with differentiated instruction for individual children, small and whole group activities
- Discuss how anecdotal notes help guide our decision-making while planning lessons

Monthly Meetings continued

- Discuss training from staff development meeting and how to transfer into classroom practice. Help each other with questions or clarifications. Decide what steps to take to further your learning
- Discuss ideas for all parts of the instructional requirements of the daily schedule for children
- Make literacy or learning centers or games for your classrooms
- Discuss, write, help each other with: DRDP-PS, ILPs, P/T Conference preps, other paperwork, etc.
- Complete Cluster Team Feedback Sheet

Target Updates with Leadership Team

- Prepare three bullet points of importance to share
- Prepare one or more concerns you, your team, or your families have to share
- Provide additional items for the agenda
- Come to the LT Meeting prepared to represent your cluster group

Leadership Team

- Ensure teams focus on planning for increased child outcomes
- Ensure structure, attendance, participation, and materials
- Address concerns via email or phone call
- Listen, intervene only when necessary
- Analyze outcomes to see who needs further assistance and pair teachers
- Provide feedback

Team Leaders

- Solicit topics of interest from members
- Prepare agenda
- Facilitate team meeting
- Ensure attendance
- Ensure full participation
- Supply feedback from Leadership Team
- Provide materials
- Complete Feedback Sheet

Reflections

- Collect ChildPlus reports for data analysis
- Determine strengths and weaknesses
- Target instructional strategies
- Collaborate
- Plan for improvement
- Build capacity

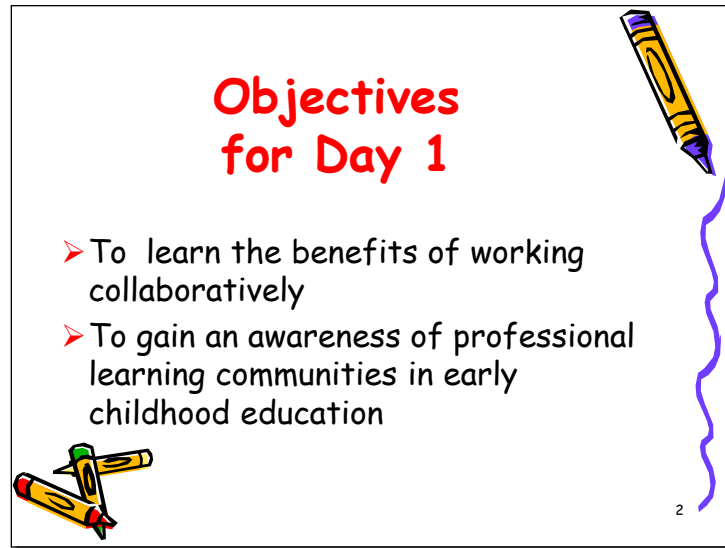
The Project Implementation Presentation

Slide 1



- Introduction to the Project Study; Professional Learning Communities in Early Childhood Education
- Three day in-service for professional development
- Welcome sheets, agenda, resources
- Materials on the tables; hand-outs, paper, pencils, Post-its, bags

Slide 2



**Objectives
for Day 1**

- To learn the benefits of working collaboratively
- To gain an awareness of professional learning communities in early childhood education

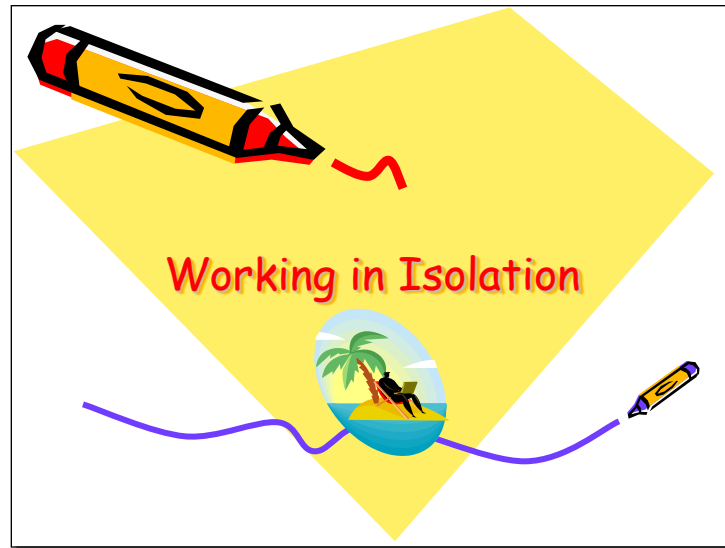
2

Today we're going to learn some of the benefits of collaboration among colleagues. We know what collaborations in regards to LEAs, community agencies, etc. But as we challenge ourselves to meet the requirements in the Head Start Act, we need to focus more of our efforts on professional development.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been implemented in the traditional K-12 setting throughout the US, and they are also being implemented in medical, business, and many other fields.

For the next three days, I am going to present PLCs as a method of staff development to our preschool programs.

Slide 3



Introduce activity.

I'm going to take you back to your high school days. Imagine you're taking your SAT.

Rules: Clear your tables. You have 15 minutes to complete this test. There will be no talking, eyes on your paper only, no questions asked, no sharing materials.

Guided discussion following the completion of the test:

- Self-inventory – Go back to the moment this activity was introduced, how did you feel when you realized you were going to do this activity on your own? Using a scale of 1-10, what number best describes your comfort level? 1 is most uncomfortable and 10 is most comfortable. Turn to the person next to you and take a few minutes to talk about this.

So let's take a look at what this looks like visually as a group. If you thought you were a 1 or 2, please stand up. This means that you were most uncomfortable. Okay you can have a seat.

Can we have all those with numbers 3-5,.... 6-8,...9-10....

So as a group, we can see that those with the 9-10 who were quick to the task, you didn't make yourself available to all those 1-2 and this became the knowledge of one instead of a knowledge of many.

Let's take a look at the number one barrier to sharing information.

Slide 4



Turn and talk with your shoulder partner. What barrier did you notice in this comic strip? Is there anyone that had an “ah-ha” moment that would like to share with the big group? Our highlights:

- He went in with an assumption. What was his assumption? We’re not going to do the age old joke about assuming...
- For those of you who are familiar with the Four Agreements, by Don Miguel Ruiz...we need to find the courage to communicate with others...
- Let’s talk a little about capacity building. Define. What does this mean for you?

Slide 5



In this picture you can see that someone here has the knowledge and someone is gaining more knowledge? This is a side-by-side, shoulder-to-shoulder process of working and learning together building capacity. Capacity isn't about numbers; its about a knowledge base and a comfort level. It's also about trust.

What is the knowledge base? Can you tell from this picture (without assuming)?

What is the comfort level? What is the level of engagement?

How does trust play into this?

Slide 6



The Power of Professional Learning Communities

The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community.

DuFour & DuFour
Copyright Solution Tree

6

The process that we go through to build capacity is known as functioning as a professional learning community.

Professional learning communities are not limited to teams of people sharing or being “team members” who go along with the group. PLCs are rich in culture, passion, and determination. PLCs are void of competition between colleagues. PLCs are a process of collaboration that focuses on results (child outcomes). Professional development becomes a product of the process. So, who are the participants in PLCs and what exactly to they have to do?

The participants are the teachers; teachers only; without site managers. The challenge will be figuring out “exactly what to do” because PLCs are a process created by the participants. Yes, you’ll have a framework to follow. You’ll develop goals, objectives, and so forth, but you aren’t going to be given a script to follow, and that’s going to be challenging for those of you who are looking for someone to tell you what to do.

It’s time for a transformation....

Slide 7

Transformation

- Identify our blind spots
- Change our perceptions
- Change our traditional ways
- Build new relationships
- Open to learn new ways of doing things




7

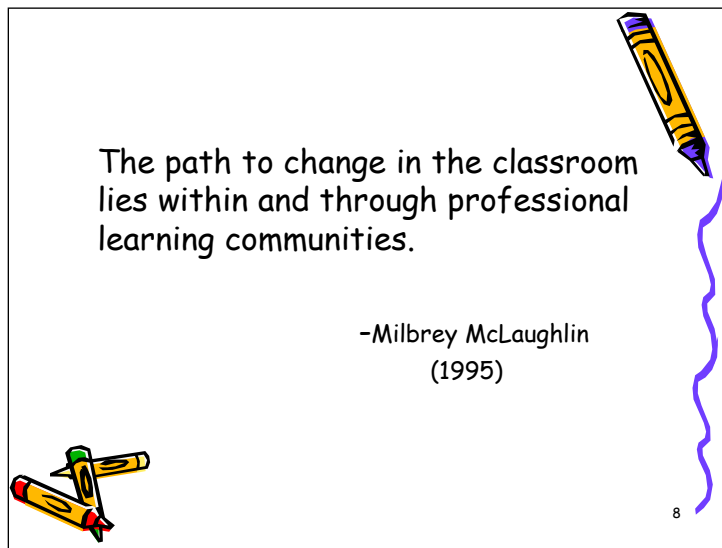
Let's talk about transformation. What do I mean by this? Talk about blind spots. We all have them. Example: Outside rear view mirrors on your car. Why do some people have those little round mirrors attached to their outside rear view mirrors? Have you ever looked around and thought the coast was clear to change lanes only to find out another car was in your blind spot? So let's take some time to think about what kinds of blind spots we might have as we conduct our everyday lives? When you go home tonight, I want you to ask someone in your household to identify one of your blind spots, and then (if you want to share) we'll take some time tomorrow morning to talk about "ah-ha" moments.

Change our perceptions. What might this look like? Someone once said to me, "If you don't like what you see, change the way you look at it." Give examples of paradigm shifts. Open microphone.

Change our traditional ways. Okay, so we were taught to do things this way when we first started. Why do we want to continue doing things the same way? Are we too comfortable? Are we in a zone? Are we clinging to the past even though we are being told we need to improve? Table discussion, facilitators, recorders and reporters...

- How can we change tradition?
- How can we build relationships?
- How do we (as adults) learn?

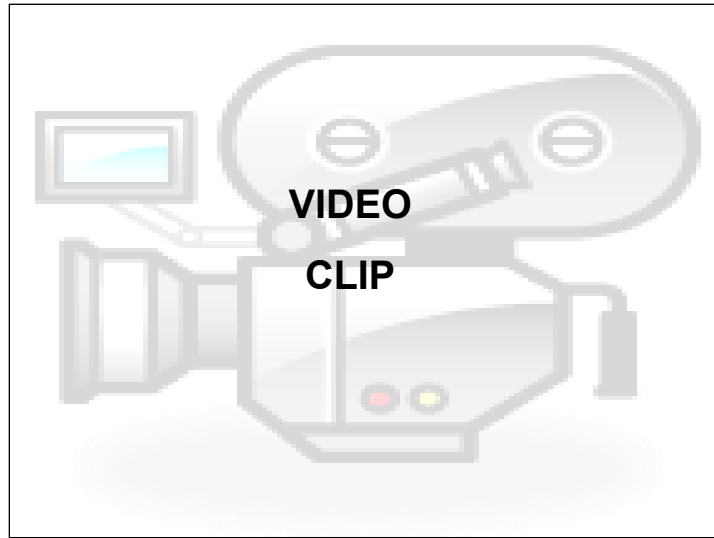
Slide 8



In these changing times, we can no longer keep doing things the way we always done them and expect different results.

We're all familiar with the ever changing world of Head Start and Early Head Start. In fact, some of you here today are probably thinking, "the administration just needs to make a decision and tell us what they really want from us." That's never going to happen; right?

Slide 9




Video clip of man on his way to work during a blizzard, but has to scrape the snow off of his car in order to get in. After the car is cleaned off, he clicks his key fob, and the snow covered car in front of the one he cleared made the “unlock” sounds and flashed lights through the snow covered lenses. He scraped the snow off of the wrong car!

Slide 10

PLC Group Think

What knowledge and tools did he utilize?



What was he missing?

10

The slide features a white background with a black border. At the top center is the title 'PLC Group Think'. Below it are two questions: 'What knowledge and tools did he utilize?' and 'What was he missing?'. A glowing lightbulb icon is positioned between the two questions. In the top right corner, there is a yellow and blue crayon with a purple squiggly line extending downwards. In the bottom left corner, there are three yellow and red crayons. The number '10' is in the bottom right corner.

He was missing information right?

He was doing the same thing he was used to doing everyday like most of us do for years and years. The things we do become rote activities or tasks instead of learned opportunities. Before we know it, we find out that we're working too hard on the wrong thing.

How can we do it differently?

Do we want to continue to bring in consultants to tell us how to do things here or do we want to consider something else?

I am confident by the end of this 3-day training, you will be ready to consider being part of the change in the way you develop professionally and improve child outcomes.

Don't forget your homework!

Slide 11



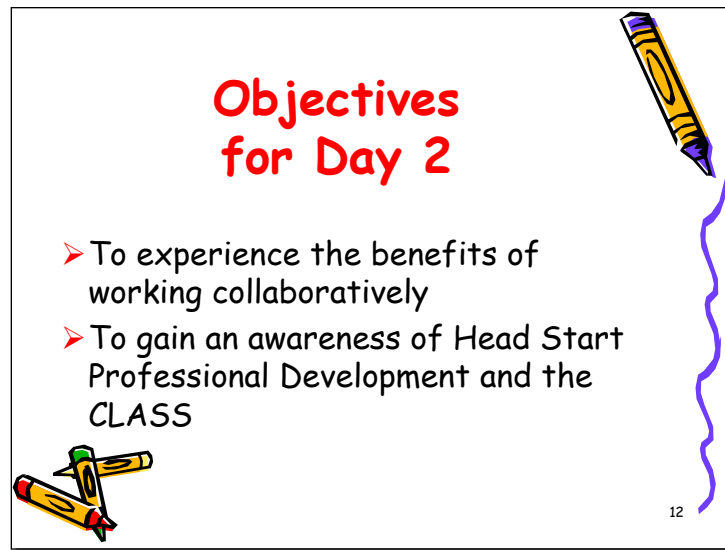
Ice breaker:

Begin with the homework assignment from Day 1.

Yesterday, I asked you to go home and ask someone to tell you what one of your blind spots were. So how did that go?

Open microphone for sharing.

Slide 12



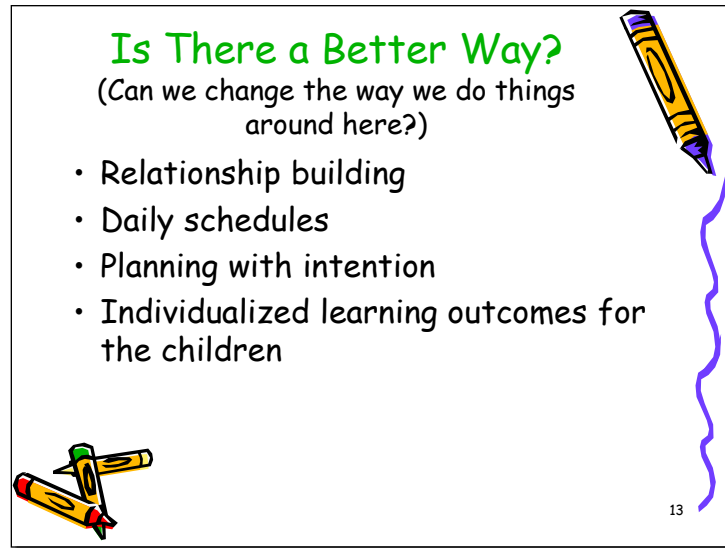
**Objectives
for Day 2**

- To experience the benefits of working collaboratively
- To gain an awareness of Head Start Professional Development and the CLASS

12

Together we are looking into the future of early childhood education and beginning to plan for “Centers of Excellence”. PLCs and CLASS are two methods currently in use throughout the US, and we will be bringing them to our preschool programs.

Slide 13



Is There a Better Way?
(Can we change the way we do things around here?)

- Relationship building
- Daily schedules
- Planning with intention
- Individualized learning outcomes for the children

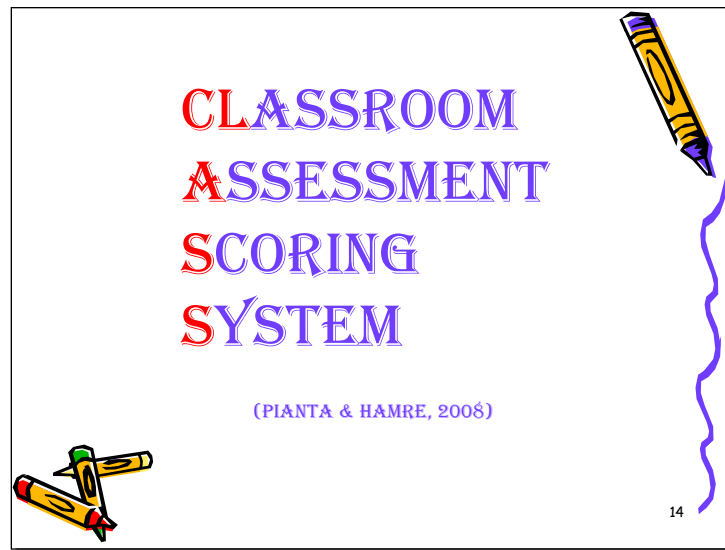
13

Recall Day-1

Is there a better way?

When we look at building relationships, we need to consider the relationships we have with the children. Are we planning for classroom quality, or are we working focusing on the wrong things while we could be working together to plan with intention for the purpose of providing high quality classroom learning experiences?

Slide 14



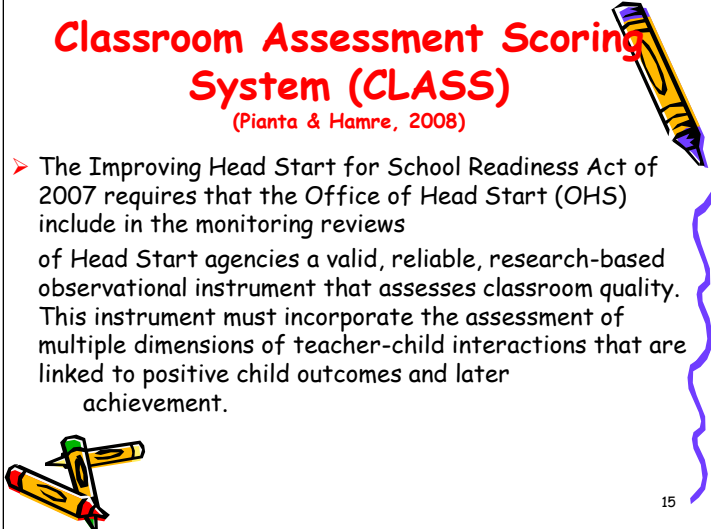
The Office of Head Start has implemented the CLASS system through a company by the name of Teachstone, which was formed out of the University of Virginia. All participants have purchased the materials from Teachstone. Our goal is to provide “*Centers of Excellence*”. The PLC process of working together and helping to support one another is a method of staff development that allows the participants (that’s you) to be actively engaged in developing and reaching the goal.

Slide 15

Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS)

(Pianta & Hamre, 2008)

➤ The Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 requires that the Office of Head Start (OHS) include in the monitoring reviews of Head Start agencies a valid, reliable, research-based observational instrument that assesses classroom quality. This instrument must incorporate the assessment of multiple dimensions of teacher-child interactions that are linked to positive child outcomes and later achievement.



15

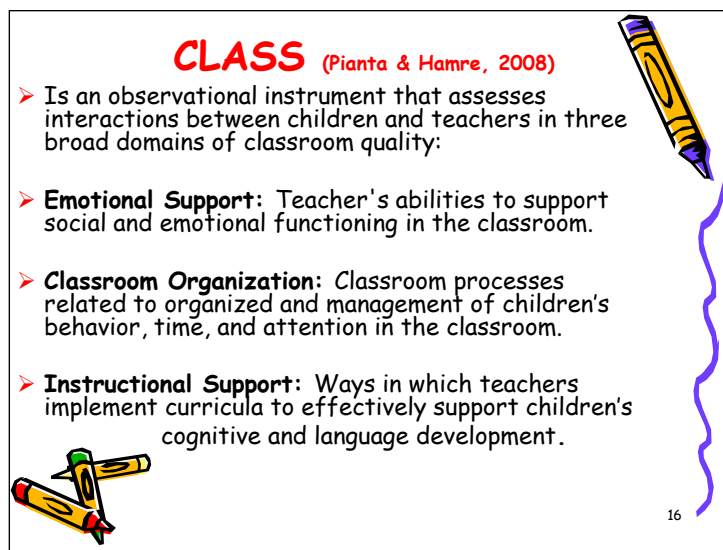
Read the regulation

Discuss the Head Start Act of 2000 when programs were mandated to increase data analysis of child outcomes. Back then, we (as a Head Start program), began tracking and analyzing the results of our children's assessment results. We also began developing more effective individual learning plans for the children with the parents. Unfortunately, while concentrating our efforts on the outcomes and the tasks to achieve positive outcomes, some of us lost focus on our relationships with the children and each other.

In 2007, Congress approved the Head Start School Readiness Act, which includes mandates for staff development in addition to school readiness for the children.

Through the results of the CLASS, you will learn specific areas in which you can improve your teaching skills, and through the process of collaboration within your PLCs, we will achieve our goal and further increase our knowledge and the children's development.

Slide 16



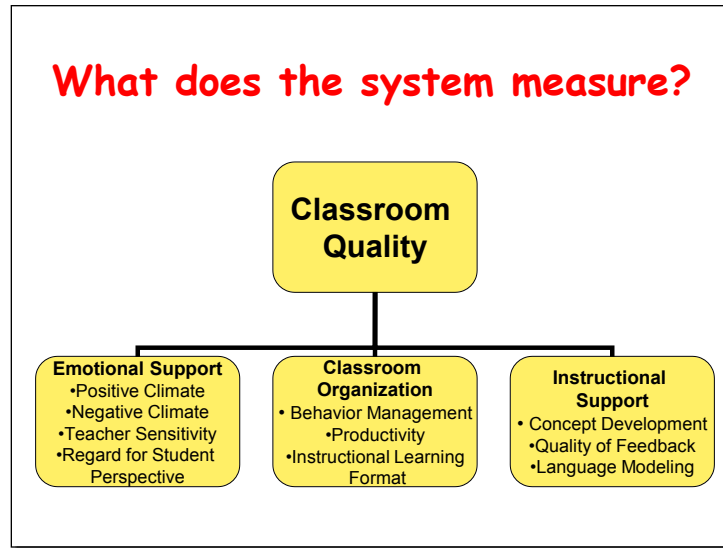
CLASS (Pianta & Hamre, 2008)

- Is an observational instrument that assesses interactions between children and teachers in three broad domains of classroom quality:
- **Emotional Support:** Teacher's abilities to support social and emotional functioning in the classroom.
- **Classroom Organization:** Classroom processes related to organized and management of children's behavior, time, and attention in the classroom.
- **Instructional Support:** Ways in which teachers implement curricula to effectively support children's cognitive and language development.

16

Read the definition and the domain elements. Remember, this training is an overview of the CLASS training and having purchased the materials from Teachstone does not provide you with any kind of certification to become CLASS reliable or to become a certified CLASS trainer of trainers. This portion of the presentation is for informational use only.

Slide 17



Three Domains

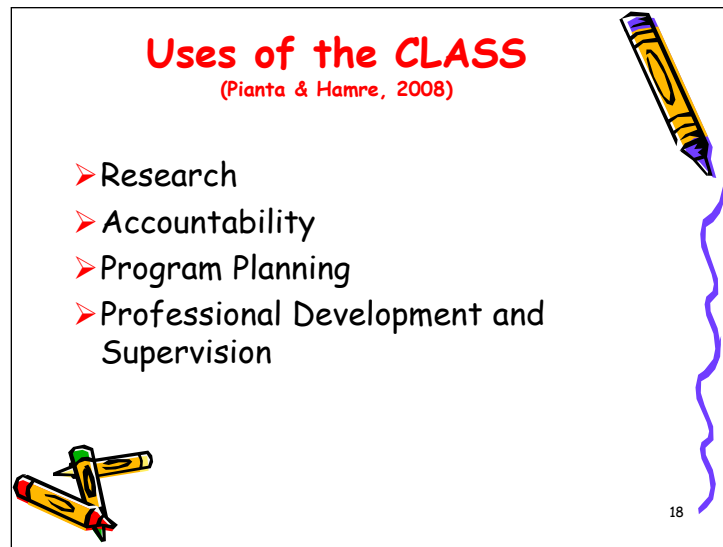
Ten Dimensions

Forty two Indicators

One hundred twenty four Behavioral Markers

So how's your math this morning!!! No really...we certainly can attest that when we go to the sites we already see these things going on in your classroom. You don't have to feel like you're getting one more thing on your plate. CLASS is not a task nor is it a test; you already did your test yesterday. By working together and supporting each other, all of this is going to surface and strengthen.

Slide 18




Uses of the CLASS
(Pianta & Hamre, 2008)

- Research
- Accountability
- Program Planning
- Professional Development and Supervision


18

CLASS is based on current research and is being used to fuel future research. CLASS provides accountability both in the classroom and for monitoring. It is one of the tools to drive program planning and one of the key elements to CLASS is the Professional Development and Supervision for staff.

Slide 19



- The CLASS is currently being implemented in Head Start programs serving children 3-5 years of age.
- A version of the CLASS for infants and toddlers is in development.

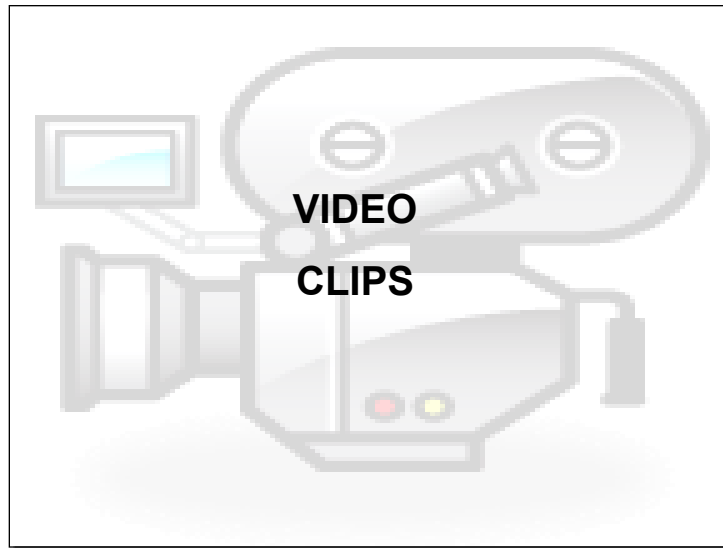


19

Read slide.

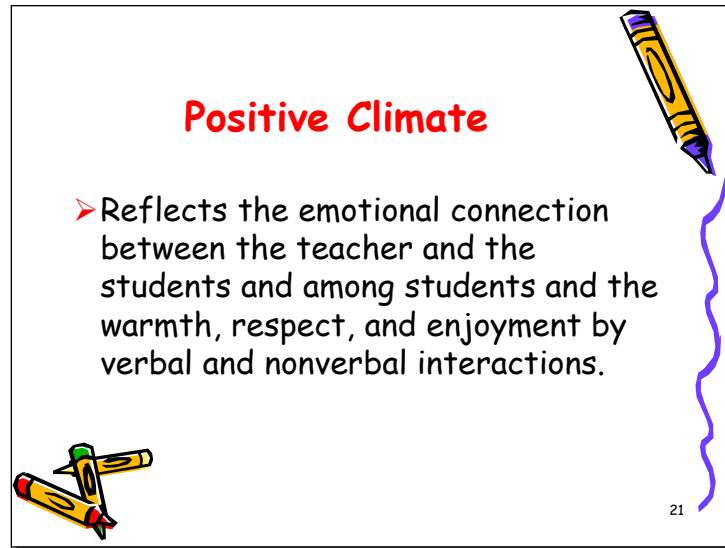
Q&A open microphone.

Slide 20



A variety of our classroom video clips are shown.
Examples of scoring provided.
Discussion and Q&A; open microphone.

Slide 21



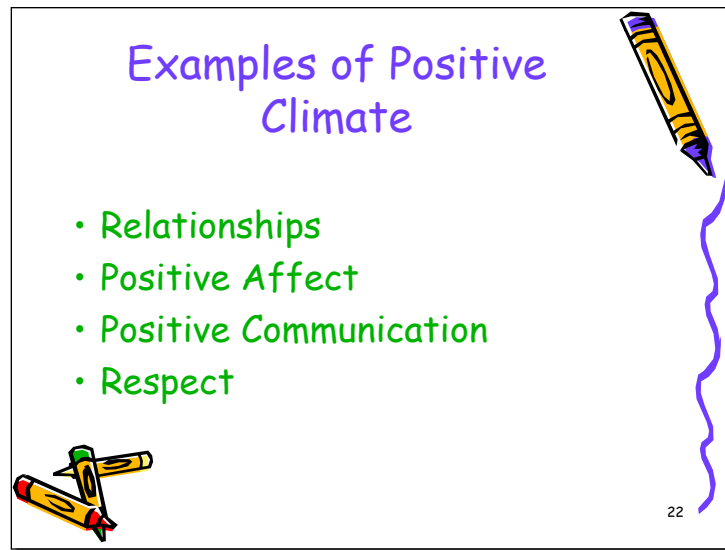
Positive Climate

- Reflects the emotional connection between the teacher and the students and among students and the warmth, respect, and enjoyment by verbal and nonverbal interactions.

21

Regarding first video clip.
Open microphone for discussion.

Slide 22




Examples of Positive Climate

- Relationships
- Positive Affect
- Positive Communication
- Respect

22


Discussion: Research tells us that nationwide classrooms are scoring above average in the Positive Climate dimension. We certainly see that at all of our sites' classrooms.

Slide 23



Teacher Sensitivity

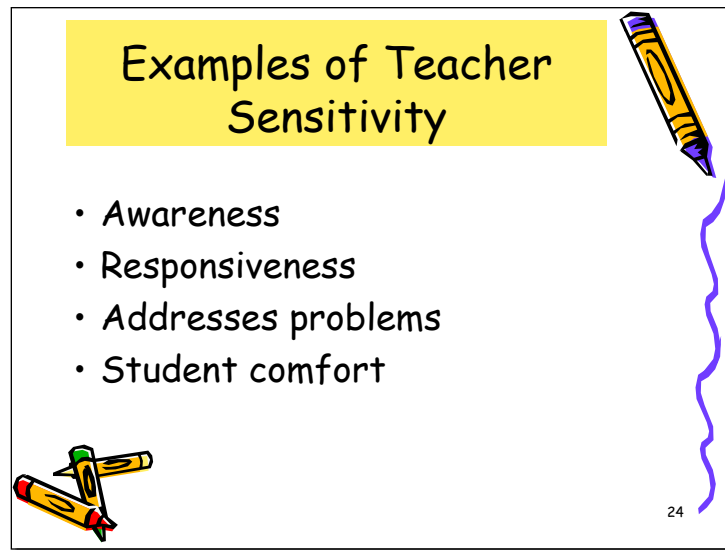
- Encompasses the teacher's awareness of and responsibility to student's academic and emotional needs, high levels of sensitivity facilitate student's ability to actively explore and learn because the teacher consistently provides comfort, reassurance, and encouragement.



23

Here's another dimension under Emotional Support
Regarding video clip #2.

Slide 24



Examples of Teacher Sensitivity

- Awareness
- Responsiveness
- Addresses problems
- Student comfort

24

Discussion: High levels of sensitivity facilitate student's ability to explore/learn because of consistent comfort, reassurance, and encouragement.
Open microphone

Slide 25



Let's say the people at your table are a group of teachers that just received their CLASS results. The outcomes on Teacher Sensitivity were a bit low; therefore worrisome to the group. As a professional learning community, you are coming together to share resources, brainstorm, and learn from one another way you can provide a higher level of sensitivity. Review the tips provided and come up with some additional suggestions.

I'll give you 20 minutes and then check to see how you're doing.

Four groups of learning communities share some tips with the larger group. Use timer and tambourine. Open microphone for discussion.

Transition out—Thank-you all for your lively participation.

Tomorrow, we will complete out final day of this training. Your homework for tonight is to reflect on the overview of CLASS and how you might be able to collaborate with your colleagues to increase your skill awareness and improve child outcomes.

Slide 26



Ice breaker: **The PLC dance (The Slide).**

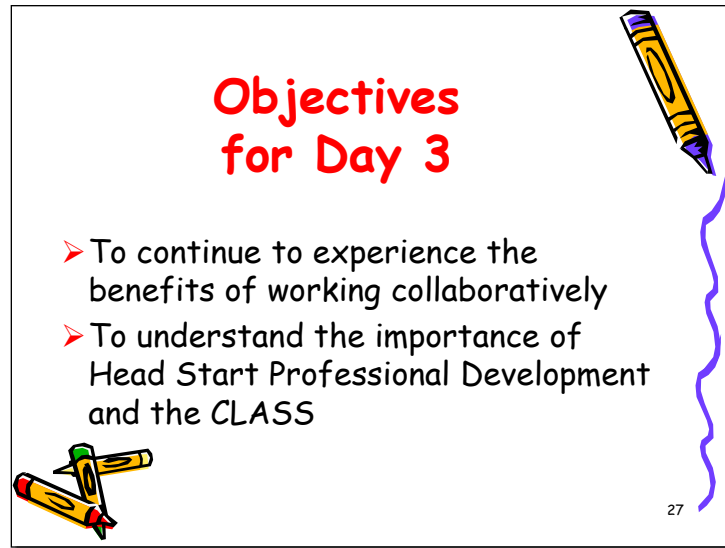
Whew! That was great! Thank you everyone. It's always good to dance and have a little fun together.

Yesterday, I asked you to reflect on the overview of the CLASS and how you might be able to collaborate with your colleagues to increase your knowledge and improve child outcomes.

So, how did that go? Let's hear about some of your reflections.

Open microphone for sharing.

Slide 27



**Objectives
for Day 3**

- To continue to experience the benefits of working collaboratively
- To understand the importance of Head Start Professional Development and the CLASS

27

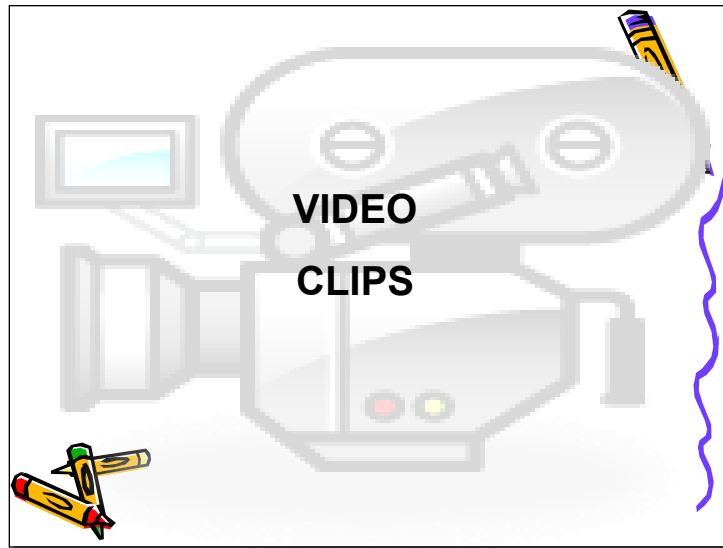
Once again, together we are looking into the future of early childhood education and beginning to plan for “Centers of Excellence”. PLCs are one of the methods currently in use throughout the US, and we will be bringing them to our preschool programs. Be thinking about what you can bring to the table?

Slide 28



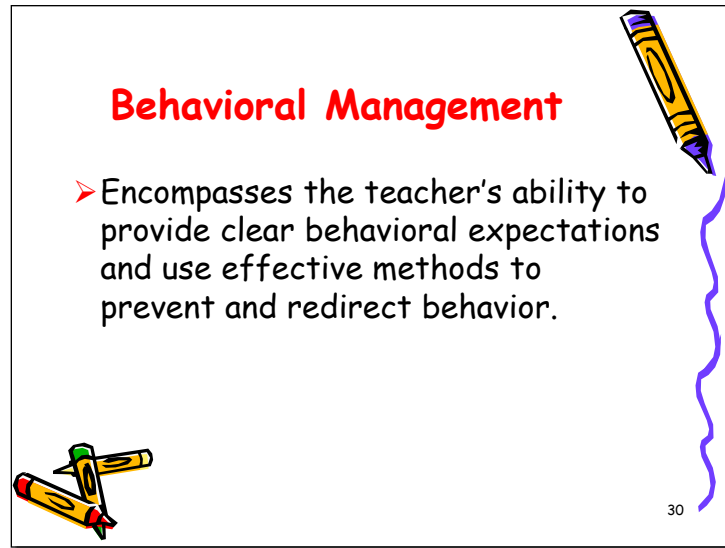
Are you ready for some more practice with videos from our classrooms?

Slide 29



A variety of our classroom video clips are shown.
Examples of scoring provided.
Discussion and Q&A; open microphone.

Slide 30



Behavioral Management

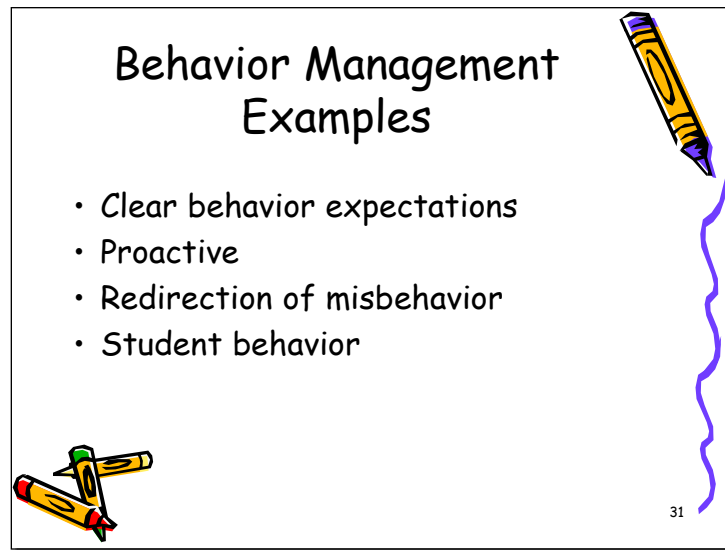
- Encompasses the teacher's ability to provide clear behavioral expectations and use effective methods to prevent and redirect behavior.

30

The slide features a yellow crayon with a blue eraser at the top right, drawing a purple wavy line down the right side. In the bottom left corner, there are three crayons: one yellow with a red eraser, one green with a yellow eraser, and one red with a yellow eraser.

Regarding the first video clip, discussion and open microphone.

Slide 31



The slide is titled "Behavior Management Examples" and is enclosed in a rectangular border. The title is centered at the top in a large, black, sans-serif font. Below the title is a bulleted list of four items: "Clear behavior expectations", "Proactive", "Redirection of misbehavior", and "Student behavior". To the right of the text, a yellow crayon is positioned vertically, with a purple wavy line extending downwards from its tip. In the bottom-left corner, three crayons (red, green, and yellow) are scattered. In the bottom-right corner, the number "31" is printed.

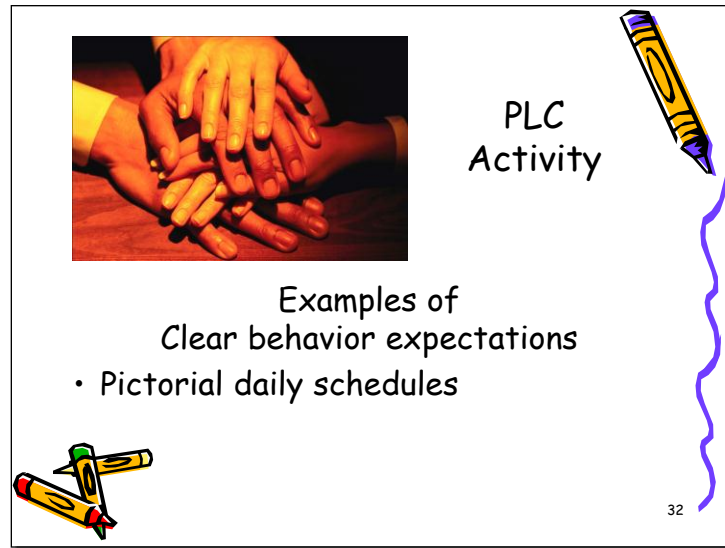
Behavior Management Examples

- Clear behavior expectations
- Proactive
- Redirection of misbehavior
- Student behavior

31

Read the examples and prepare for input from the groups.

Slide 32



PLC
Activity

Examples of
Clear behavior expectations

- Pictorial daily schedules

32

This time, let's say you are trying to determine ways to deal with challenging behaviors in your classroom. As a professional learning community, you are coming together to share resources, brainstorm, and learn from one another examples of clear behavior expectations. Review the tips provided and come up with some additional suggestions.

I'll give you 20 minutes and then check to see how you're doing.

Four groups of learning communities share some tips with the larger group. Use timer and tambourine. Open microphone for discussion.



Participants that have not reported out during the last activity will report this time (add to the list above).

A PLC tip...everyone is encouraged to participate. So, let's hear from another one of our groups.

Slide 33

Examples of Being proactive

- Ask children to tell you what they need to do before beginning an activity



33

Repeat PLC activity.
Open microphone for discussion
Participants add to the list

Slide 34



Examples for Redirection
of Misbehavior

- Use a range of techniques to remind children of your expectations

34



Continue collaboration through PLC process.

Looking at examples for redirection of misbehavior, what other strategies can we use in the classroom? Take a few moments to discuss and jot it down.

Slide 35

Examples of Student behavior

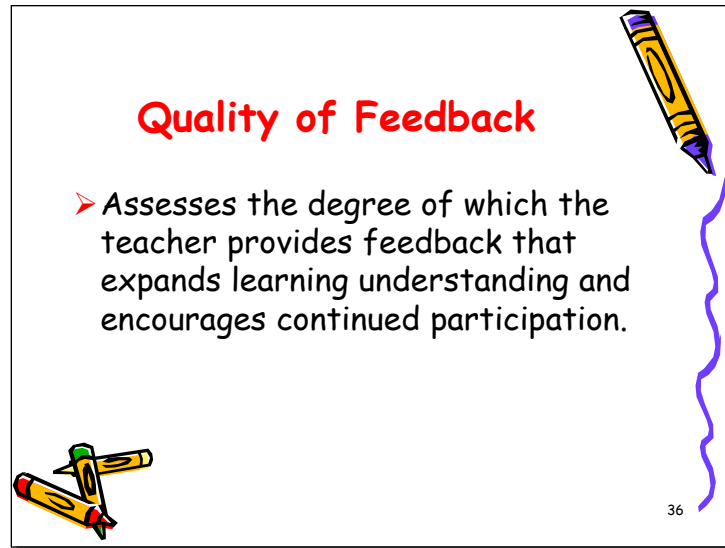
- Be aware when dual language learners are not following classroom expectations, it could be due to a lack of understanding what to do



35

Open microphone and discussion

Slide 36

The slide content is enclosed in a rectangular frame. At the top center, the title "Quality of Feedback" is written in a bold, red, sans-serif font. Below the title, a bullet point with a red arrowhead is followed by the text "Assesses the degree of which the teacher provides feedback that expands learning understanding and encourages continued participation." in a black, sans-serif font. In the top right corner of the frame, there is a yellow crayon with a blue eraser and a blue wavy line extending downwards from its tip. In the bottom left corner, there are three crayons: one yellow with a red eraser, one green with a yellow eraser, and one red with a yellow eraser. In the bottom right corner, the number "36" is printed in a small, black font.

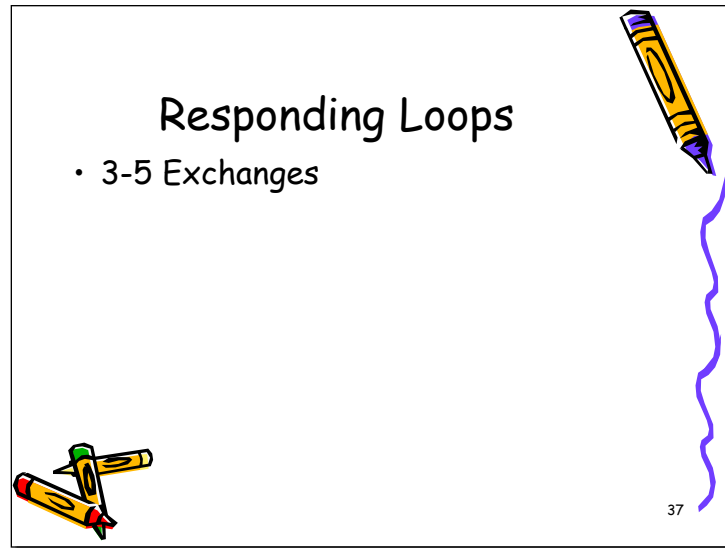
Quality of Feedback

➤ Assesses the degree of which the teacher provides feedback that expands learning understanding and encourages continued participation.

36

Regarding this video
Let's continue to work in our groups
Open microphone for discussion

Slide 37



Responding Loops

- 3-5 Exchanges

37

In your PLC group, break into pairs. Your challenge is to engage in a conversation that consists of quality feedback. Between the two of you, decide who will initiate the conversation. The initiator will open the conversation with a statement. The responder will continue the conversation that includes 4-5 good exchanges. (follow up exchange statements)

Share with the larger group. Open microphone for discussion.

Slide 38



I hope your time together has been meaningful and purposeful and that seeds of this process will stay with and that you continue to share and learn from one another. I really applaud and recognize the great work you do! I would like to leave you with the following images and thoughts.

Show video

Appendix B - Interviews

Introduction to Interview for Teachers

School Name: _____ Date: _____

Name of Person Interviewed: _____

Title: _____

Start time: _____ End time: _____

The purpose of this interview is to learn more about how you increase learning through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities and further increase child outcomes. The information collected from this research project will inform the current literature and broaden opportunities for staff development in early childhood education.

Interview Questions for Teachers

1. Please tell me about your education and experience as it relates to your current position.
2. Describe the practices and strategies related to PLCs that you believe contribute to your professional growth.
3. What training or opportunities for professional growth have you received as it relates to improving children's outcomes? When?
4. What role do you have in participating in professional learning communities?
5. How are your meetings structured and evaluated?
6. How often do you meet with other teachers and under what circumstances?
7. What do you do with the meeting evaluations?

8. Do you have opportunities to visit other centers to observe other preschool teachers and share ideas including setting up the environment? If so, please explain.
9. How do children benefit from the PLC process?
10. How do you assess children?
11. What assessment tools are you currently using?
12. Explain any changes you've experienced professionally as a result of PLCs.
13. What modifications were made to improve child outcomes as a result of PLCs?
14. Can you share a success story as well as a not so successful story in regards to your involvement with PLCs?

Introduction to Interview for Administrative Staff

School Name: _____ Date: _____

Name of Person Interviewed: _____

Title: _____

Start time: _____ End time: _____

The purpose of this interview is to learn more about how you increase learning through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities and further increase child outcomes. The information collected from this research project will inform the current literature and broaden opportunities for staff development in early childhood education.

Interview Questions for Administrators

1. Please tell me about your education and experience as it relates to your current position.
2. Describe the practices and strategies related to PLCs that you believe contribute to professional growth.
3. What training or opportunities for professional growth have you presented as it relates to improving children's outcomes? When?
4. What role do you have in participating in professional learning communities?
5. How are your meetings structured and evaluated?
6. How often do you meet with other teachers and under what circumstances?
7. What do you do with the meeting evaluations?
8. Do you have opportunities to visit other centers to observe other preschool teachers and share ideas including setting up the environment? If so, please explain.

9. How do children benefit from the PLC process?
10. How do you monitor staff development?
11. What tracking tools are you currently using?
12. Explain any changes you've noticed in your staff and children as a result of PLCs.
13. What modifications were made to improve child outcomes as a result of PLCs?
14. Can you share a success story as well as a not so successful story in regards to your involvement with PLCs?

Appendix C - Surveys

Survey Questions for Teachers

Teachers,

You have been selected to participate in the survey as part of the study of Professional Learning Communities. Your opinion is important and appreciated. The purpose of the survey is to gather information regarding your perceptions on teacher support and professional learning communities. The information you provide will assist the researcher in developing strategies to improve staff development and further increase student achievement.

This survey is intended to collect data anonymously. The results of the surveys will be kept in a confidential file until the completion of the study. At that time, the surveys will be shredded. Having read and understood the information above, please take a few minutes to complete this survey.

Using the key below, place an “x” next to the corresponding number and answer the following survey items:

Definitely agree	1
Agree	2
Disagree	3
Definitely disagree	4

1. I complete weekly lesson plans based on on-going observations of my students.

__1 __2 __3 __4

2. I incorporate my students’ assessment results into my weekly lesson plans.

__1 __2 __3 __4

3. I receive computer generated reports of my students’ assessment results.

__1 __2 __3 __4

4. I currently analyze computer generated reports of my students’ assessment results to plan lessons and to create Individualized Learning Plans/Goals (ILP goals).

__1 __2 __3 __4

5. I work with other teachers and receive feedback when creating lesson plans.
__1__ __2__ __3__ __4
6. I feel I am given adequate time for analyzing reports, planning lessons, and reviewing ILP goals.
__1__ __2__ __3__ __4
7. Having an opportunity to network with other teachers for the purpose of planning is something that interests me.
__1__ __2__ __3__ __4
8. I feel I would have something to contribute to a teacher planning cluster.
__1__ __2__ __3__ __4
9. I need more help with implementing Individualized Learning Plans/Goals (ILP goals).
__1__ __2__ __3__ __4
10. Visiting other Head Start grantee operated sites is something I would be interested in.
__1__ __2__ __3__ __4

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this planning survey. Please return your completed survey to Robin Fairfield.

Survey Questions for Administrators

Administrators,

You have been selected to participate in the survey as part of the study of Professional Learning Communities. Your opinion is important and appreciated. The purpose of the survey is to gather information regarding your perceptions on teacher support and professional learning communities. The information you provide will assist the researcher in developing strategies to improve staff development and further increase student achievement.

This survey is intended to collect data anonymously. The results of the surveys will be kept in a confidential file until the completion of the study. At that time, the surveys will be shredded. Having read and understood the information above, please take a few minutes to complete this survey.

Survey Questions for Administrators

Using the key below, place an “x” next to the corresponding number and answer the following survey items:

Definitely agree	1
Agree	2
Disagree	3
Definitely disagree	4

1. I regularly review lesson plans based on on-going observations of the students.

1 2 3 4

2. I monitor how teachers use students' assessment results to plan lessons.

1 2 3 4

3. I receive computer generated reports of students' assessment results.

1 2 3 4

4. I currently monitor computer generated reports of assessment results to plan lessons and Individualized Learning Plans/Goals (ILP goals).

1 2 3 4

5. I work with staff members and receive feedback regarding cluster meetings.

__1 __2 __3 __4

6. Having an opportunity to network with other teachers for the purpose of planning is something that I believe supports staff development and furthers student achievement.

__1 __2 __3 __4

7. It is important for teachers to contribute to a teacher planning cluster.

__1 __2 __3 __4

8. Teachers learn best from other teachers.

__1 __2 __3 __4

9. Visiting other preschool sites is important for staff development and awareness.

__1 __2 __3 __4

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this planning survey. Please return your completed survey to Robin Fairfield.

Survey Questions for Administrative Staff

Administrative staff members,

You have been selected to participate in the survey as part of the study of Professional Learning Communities. Your opinion is important and appreciated. The purpose of the survey is to gather information regarding your perceptions on teacher support and professional learning communities. The information you provide will assist the researcher in developing strategies to improve staff development and further increase student achievement.

This survey is intended to collect data anonymously. The results of the surveys will be kept in a confidential file until the completion of the study. At that time, the surveys will be shredded. Having read and understood the information above, please take a few minutes to complete this survey.

Survey Questions for Administrative Staff

Using the key below, place an “x” next to the corresponding number and answer the following survey items:

Definitely agree	1
Agree	2
Disagree	3
Definitely disagree	4

1. I regularly review lesson plans based on on-going observations of the students.

1 2 3 4

2. I monitor how teachers use students' assessment results to plan lessons.

1 2 3 4

3. I receive computer generated reports of students' assessment results.

1 2 3 4

4. I currently monitor computer generated reports of assessment results to plan lessons and Individualized Learning Plans/Goals (ILP goals).

1 2 3 4

5. I work with staff members and receive feedback regarding cluster meetings.

__1 __2 __3 __4

6. Having an opportunity to network with other teachers for the purpose of planning is something that I believe supports staff development and furthers student achievement.

__1 __2 __3 __4

7. It is important for teachers to contribute to a teacher planning cluster.

__1 __2 __3 __4

8. Teachers learn best from other teachers.

__1 __2 __3 __4

9. Visiting other preschool sites is important for staff development and awareness.

__1 __2 __3 __4

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this planning survey. Please return your completed survey to Robin Fairfield.

Appendix D - Observation Tools

Professional Learning Communities

- Is there a sign in sheet for the teachers?
- Is there a teacher leader present?
- Is there involvement between all teachers present?

RQ 1 Look for the following:

- Strategies to increase teachers' learning and development.
- Strategies to increase child outcomes.
 - Cooperative involvement
 - Learning materials
 - Use of time
 - Responsive feedback

RQ 2 Look for the following:

- Physical environment
- Seating arrangement
- Classroom set up
 - Communication and interactions
 - Informational
 - Reflective engagement

- Reflective processes
- Results oriented
- Samples of children's work
- Daily schedules
- Organization
- Materials

RQ 3 Look for the following:

- Social climate

- Staff dynamics

- Interactions between teachers
- New ideas presented
- Operations
- Tracking and accountability

Observation Tools

Staff Development Meetings

Guiding Questions for Professional Staff Development Observations

- Is there a sign in sheet?
- Does networking and collaboration take place before staff development?
- Does networking and collaboration take place after staff development?
- What staff members involved in planning?
- How are expected outcomes of the staff development presented?
- How are staff members participating?
- Are all staff members engaged?
- What kind of information is being presented?
- Is time given for reflection?
- Is the professional development practical and beneficial to teacher learning?
- Is there an evaluation used?

Appendix E - Tables

Table 1

Commonalities for Teachers' Increased Learning

Modalities	Description
Training opportunities	Monthly staff development meetings, professional workshops, and professional conferences.
Teacher meetings	Weekly meetings have an advantage over monthly staff development because new ideas and strategies are implemented in the classroom more quickly, which increases opportunities to reflect and improve.
Collaborations	Builds on strengths, culture, trust, and empowerment.
Experience	Early childhood education and adult learning.
Observation	Visiting other classrooms and observing other teachers' instructional strategies makes it easier to see how to implement the same curriculum in different ways.
Coaching	Serves as a support by way of positive feedback, encouragement, and filling in for the teacher allowing other classroom observation visits.
Modifications	Data analysis is completed by administrative team and changes are implemented by the teachers. More time is needed for data analysis and reflective planning.

Table 2

Benefits to children's learning and school readiness skills

Modalities	Benefits
Teaching strategies	Speeds up the learning process as teachers implement a variety of strategies learned from other teachers that would not have been learned on their own.
Classroom activities	New activities capture the curiosity and create excitement in the children.
Individualization	Strategic lessons and experiences are generated based on knowledge gained from other teacher's experiences with children, families, and community collaborations.
Assessment	Data is reviewed individually and collectively. Interpretations are collectively addressed and modifications are made.

Table 3

Survey Responses

Question	Definitely agree	Agree	Disagree	Definitely disagree
11. I complete weekly lesson plans based on ongoing observations of my students	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxx	x	
12. I incorporate my students' assessment results into my weekly lesson plans	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxxx		x
13. I receive computer generated reports of students' assessment results	xxx	xxxxxxx	xxx	xxx
14. I currently analyze computer generated reports of my students' assessment results	xxxx	xxx	xxxxxx	xxx
15. I work with other teachers and receive feedback when creating lesson plans	xxxxxxx	xxxxxxx		xx
16. I feel I am given adequate time for analyzing reports, planning lessons, and reviewing ILP goals	xxxxx	xxxxxxx	xxx	xxx
17. Having an opportunity to network with other teachers for the purpose of planning is something that interest me	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxxx		x
18. I feel I would have something to contribute to a teacher planning cluster	xxxxxxxxxxxx	xxx		x
19. I need more help with implementing Individualized Learning Plans/Goals (ILP goals)		xxxxxxx xx	xxxx	xx
20. Visiting other preschool sites is something I would be interested in	xxxxxxxxxxxx	x	x	

Appendix F - Raw Data

Examples of Journal Entries

Example 1

Monday, January 24, 2011

Cluster Observation

Participants are arriving...3pm...setting up snack tables, greeting one another, turning in paperwork, retrieving mail, etc. Many are catching up on personal matters. TL from one of the clusters is pregnant.

Zebra cluster...shared reading...celebrations...Valentine's Day activities...sentence strips #s written out and compared to numbers. Said, "I never would have considered something like that. I didn't think the children would be interested. I can't believe it". Lesson plan theme is "working together". Leader is facilitating group and has Cluster Feedback form provided by the coordinator.

Example 2

Monday, January 24, 2011

Cluster Observation

Panda cluster presents Literacy Day. "Llama, Llama, Red Pajama"...each member presents their ideas with samples for the group. Looks like a unique gift exchange...everyone is so excited...this event is going to be big!

Example 3

Monday, January 31, 2011

Staff Development Observation

Participants are sitting in cluster groups with stuffed animal mascots...catching up...sharing...eating...

Agenda followed...program updates...Zero tolerance policy from licensing...supervision, mentor teacher program...all teachers in this district's ECEP are qualified to be mentor teachers. All have BA degrees plus.

Head Start Act reviewed.

Presentation by literacy coach

V#1

Identify target behaviors. Vignette; discussion importance of teacher attention, encouragement, and praise towards the children...group interactions, etc.

Examples of Journal Entries

*Example 4**February 28, 2011**Cluster Observation*

Group is working on plans for Literacy Day presentation at next staff development meeting. Each teacher is sharing updates...leader is taking notes and asking for input in organizing the presentation.

Teacher shared difficulties with word wall, getting parent surveys back, helping parents with transition surveys, and Spring break. Everyone taking turns speaking and sharing samples. Also review calendars...planning science centers...outdoor activities.

*Example 5**February 28, 2011**Staff Development Observation*

Staff members are either running late or are not coming. Program Coordinator makes announcements. Two staff members called in...others should be there. Raining outside...may need a little extra time.

Sign in sheet, handouts available...food again. Cluster teams are sitting at different tables than previous meetings; still in groups. Two cluster leaders are missing. Some instructional assistants are present. Literacy coaches present small group training. Teachers turn in homework and book reading.

**Video recordings of clusters brainstorming during meeting.*

*Example 6**March 4, 2011**Administrative Meeting Observation*

Participants arriving with food for potluck and sharing informally...sign in sheets, agendas, handouts, etc. Discuss norms for meeting. PAC Meetings, Physicals, Family Partnership Agreements and examples of short and long term goals for year three grant.

Discussion about home visits and parent fears...some are giving examples to share with staff on how to help parents understand the purpose of home visits. Lots of ideas shared. Individual leaders sharing and receiving feedback from admin team... Literacy coach offering support... Other program updates.

Examples of Livescribe Entries
(Audio not included)

Antea Bilayer 1-31-11

1. Not finished BA degree -
March
Worked 4 yrs @ Magnolia
Baptist Preschool
4 Temple Bethel
6th yr @ ESUS.
Head Start 6th year.
2. New information is related.
I find out that other teachers
have the same struggles.
Find lots of new ways
to do - the same things.
3. Attend conferences. Going
to FSA. Annually.
4. Participant. Tigets.
5. We have an agenda from
our leader & she would tell
us what to bring. Sometimes
she would call ahead to
see what the groups want
to discuss. Discussion &
someone takes notes. There
are 4 or 5 teachers. We
used to meet in each other's
classrooms, at lunch or at
the ECEP meeting office.

Examples of Livescribe Entries continued

6. I visit classrooms informally.
7. Don't recall
- 8.
9. Strategies & new ideas.
You're just more open to learning new things. Every time we meet we come away with so many new things to share with the rest of the staff.
10. Anecdotal notes, checklists
11. D&D P5
questionnaires
parent input
PDS
12. It's a lot easier for me to plan because having 2 sets of responsibilities so you don't have to do everything at home or on weekends.
A lot more effective.
13. Individualize reflection
14. It's just a really neat thing to get together with other people who have the same experiences. We learn from one another.

Examples of Livescribe Entries continued

BA in Soc for UC Riv
 Soc. Worker with County Riv
 Credentialed
 5th grade at Beatty
 preschool since Jan 3, 2011

2. PLCs focused, team sharing,
 large group, Informatic
 Interactive literacy
 1 Coach assigned to Cluster
 2 Coached
 Previous teacher mentors
 Weekly visits
3. Participates in Cluster but doesn't
 know the name, With Fremont
 Grant
4. Not yet familiar. Cluster is
 providing support
5. Monday afternoon,
 Anita & Shawn
7. NA
8. Observing another teacher
 Director gives the classroom
9. Worked on being consistent
 with lessons & materials.
 Cluster received same learning
 experiences. Same resources

Examples of Livescribe Entries continued

- 2-2-11
1. RCC - ECE AA
 2. 14 yrs.
Sound ideas, exchange ideas, improvements, assessments
Speakers @ parent mtg, field trips.
 3. Monthly staff dev
Budget - conferences & workshops
1st Aid, CPR, encouraged to take classes.
Visit K classroom. Share the playground. Eat in cafeteria
1x per week.
 4. Role is to learn & to share
Team leader for couple of years.
T.C. → Group together, create agenda
compile materials
TLs meet w/ Martha.
 5. 1 hr.
 6. At staff dev. meetings
literacy coach will step in so
teacher can observe other
schools. Previously met at
other classrooms rotations
 7. Admin observations - feedback
 8. Not yet
 9. Inspiring from other teachers
enthusiastic - sometimes over

Examples of Livescribe Entries continued

Welcomed but not from the cluster.

10. Uk sheets anecdotal notes.

11. Mainly observation.
DRDP

12. Before we were operating in isolation. Everybody interpreted everything differently. Confidence builder & getting ideas.

12 Yes. We did not have high expectations. More structured.

13
14. Having difficulties w/ environment
Visited another classroom.
Exchanged ideas.
Trust.

Not all business
Changed members. Blend.

Examples of Feedback

Preschool Team Feedback Sheet

Team: Giraffe Date: 1/31/11

Teachers Present: Becky H. Denise Israel
Kathryn Avila, Mary Moreno

Teachers Absent (include reason for absence): _____

Purpose(s)/Objectives of the meeting: Set up calendar
for the year, exchange ideas,
and plan for unit 20

Agenda Items:

- Plan theme 2
- Share ideas for Sept and Oct
- Theme calendar for the year
- Questions and concerns

Actions/Outcomes:

- Planned out theme 2 center
using Scholastic
Shared ideas
 - Many: cooking projects
 - Denise: art paper bag pumpkins
 - Hawthorne: ABC Books
 - Pachappa: Shared reading
and books for large group
- * We all discussed other pumpkin
ideas
- Set up theme calendar. We also
set up letter of the week to
match introduction that kinder
uses.

Questions/Concerns:

- Next mtg the group would like
 - * More Shared reading ideas
 - * More hand copies of ideas
 - * Agenda sooner



Other:

- Group also wanted me to send hand copies of the lg / small group books I shared

Cluster Team Feedback Sheet

Team Members Present:

Mania Montecino
 Mania R. Esteva
 Paul Sykes
 Anita Bilueu
 Jemial Robinson

Team Members Absent: (Include reason for absence)

Meeting Topics/Products/Outcomes:

They went over the parent workshop, parent were really involved. Teachers got new ideas to do in their classroom. Teachers feel good with the idea that we don't have to do the preparation for different stations, just be there to assist. Thank you for that!!

We continue to use this time to make or planning for the meet. We exchange ideas to use in small group activities.

Went over our notes taking with students preparing for our coming parent conference in March. Report about the new registration were shared.

Questions/Concerns from Team:

Group concern or question:
 Will we be having the same community ass and office assistant next year. It will be nice to keep same support staff at least for two years.

Location and Date of Next Meeting:

Highgrove A.M. March 28, 2011

Example of Leadership Team Meetings Agenda

Early Childhood & Family Education Planning Committee Agenda

Martha Jackson, Coordinator	ⓧ	Linda Staples, Evaluator	ⓧ
Kathy Pitchford, Literacy Coach	ⓧ	Vicki Wilson, PS Nurse	ⓧ
Ines Anderson, Disabilities	○	Karen Johnson, CalSAFE	○
Bertha Toner, Even Start	ⓧ	Denise Small SP	ⓧ
Anita Bilyeu HS	ⓧ	Rosa Bolanos SP	ⓧ
Mary Funchess HS	ⓧ	Luz Romero, FSS	ⓧ
Laura Rubi HS	ⓧ	Rosemary Morgan, CPS	ⓧ
Maria Alvarado (HS Parent)	ⓧ	Katie Bryson (SP Parent)	○
Kristine Dorame (SP Parent)	ⓧ		

- | | |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Welcome and Introductions | Martha |
| 2. ECERS Reviews | Martha |
| 3. Team Meetings Feedback | |
| i. Giraffe | Denise |
| ii. Panda | Rosie |
| iii. Zebra | Mary |
| iv. Tiger | Anita |
| v. Elephants | Shawn |
| 4. Even Start Update | Bertha |
| 5. ERSEA and CA/OA Update | Luz |
| 6. Health and Safety Update | Vicki |
| ✓7. Parent Cluster Workshops I – Family Number Fun | Kathy |
| 8. Nutrition Update | Adleit |
| 9. Disabilities Update | Ines |
| 10. CPM/PRISM Self Reviews | Martha |
| 11. Announcements/Concerns | All |

Meeting Norms: Attend all meetings. Start and end on time. Respect others opinions. Follow agenda

Curriculum Vitae

Robin Fairfield
Robinfairfield@sbcglobal.net

Education

- 2007-2011* Walden University, Baltimore, MD.
Ed.D. Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning
- 2002-2003* Hope International University, Fullerton, CA.
Master of Education *with Honors* – Broad Based
- 1999-2002* Hope International University, Fullerton, CA.
Bachelor of Science *Magna Cum Laude* - Human Development
- 1992-1998* Saddleback Community College, Mission Viejo, CA.
Associate of Science *Magna Cum Laude* - Child Development

Credentials / Certifications

- 2002* Program Director Permit
California Commission on Teacher Credentialing
- 1998* Early Childhood Education Teaching Certificate
Saddleback Community College, Mission Viejo, CA.
- 2000* Master Teacher Permit
California Commission on Teacher Credentialing

Education Experience

- 2004 to present* Program Development Specialist, Riverside County Office of Education
- 2004 to present* Adjunct Faculty/Vanguard University of Southern California
Child Development
- 2005 to present* Child Development and Education Consultant, Danya International
- 2002-2004* Site Manager, Riverside County Office of Education Head Start-State
Preschool
- 1991-2002* Teacher, Riverside County Office of Education Head Start-State Preschool
Director, Las Brisas Christian Preschool
Director, Assistant Director, Grace Christian Preschool

Other Experiences

Over 24 years of experience in the field of early childhood education.

Teacher, mentor, assistant director, and director.

Program Coordinator/Director for summer preschool programs

Seminar Presenter/Workshop Coordinator

Head Start Federal Reviewer (Child Development) and Report Coordinator