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Quonias Hudson

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Dr. Kimetta Hairston, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Karen Hunt, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2015

Abstract

The Effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities as Perceived by Elementary School Teachers

by

Quonias Hudson

EdS, Walden University, 2012

MA, Central Michigan University, 2008

BS, University of West Georgia, 2007

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

July 2015

Abstract

School districts in a southeastern state have faced the challenge of choosing an effective professional development model that assists teachers in improving student achievement. Some school districts have implemented professional learning communities (PLCs) as a means of addressing teachers' professional development. Guided by the social learning theories of Bandura, Vygotsky, and Wenger, the research questions focused on teachers' perceptions of the use of PLC experiences for making classroom decisions and their value for enhancing teacher learning, teacher collaboration, and student learning. Data for this case study were collected from 7 certified elementary teachers in 1 school who had participated in PLCs for 2 years. Interview data were coded and reviewed for common themes and patterns. The results of this study revealed that teachers perceived there was not enough time for teacher collaboration and teacher learning built into the activities and structure of the current PLC at the study site. The findings from this study were used to create a 3-day training session for local teachers on how to structure and function in a PLC environment. The sessions include training for grade-level chairpersons and professional development sessions for grade-level teams of teachers. The project will give the elementary teachers in this school meaningful opportunities to positively affect their own and students' learning and share learned practices and skills with other teachers in the district. Achieving social change at a larger level is possible as this professional development opportunity with a focus on teacher and student learning can serve as a model for other schools in the district.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Due to increased accountability, many school districts are implementing professional learning communities (PLCs) to support teachers in identifying instructional strategies to meet students' learning needs (Thessin & Starr, 2011). The importance of PLCs as a means of improving a teacher's instructional practice and student learning is well documented in the literature (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). When teachers participate in PLCs, they accept the responsibility for students' learning as well as their own professional growth. Although many teachers achieve success via their participation in PLCs, research suggests that PLCs must be effective in order to enhance professional growth and student achievement (DuFour et al., 2008). In other words, PLCs have the potential to help teachers grow professionally and improve their teaching practices if teachers are active and engaged participants during PLCs that are meaningfully and appropriately designed. "The opportunity for teachers to participate actively and collaboratively in professional communities is an essential component of high-quality professional development" (Van Driel & Berry, as cited in Borko, Jacobs, & Koellner, 2010). Effective PLCs are a productive form of professional development that assists teachers in achieving their goals (DuFour et al., 2008).

In Section 1, I offer a definition of the problem, rationale, definition of special terms, and significance of the study. The research questions guiding the study, review of literature, implications, and summary are presented in this section.

Definition of the Problem

Georgia schools face the challenge of choosing a professional development model that helps teachers increase the academic achievement of students and supports the implementation of the recently developed Common Core Georgia Performance Standards (Georgia Department of Education, 2012). Teachers at one urban elementary school work and plan separately and are often passive participants in professional development activities. For example, during professional development activities, teachers are observed grading papers, checking and responding to e-mails, and discussing students rather than strategies. Teachers at this school have expressed difficulty planning differentiated instruction to meet the various needs of their diverse learners due to the lack of common planning time. This uncollaborative type of professional development has negatively impacted teachers' professional learning experiences in the school. In fact, in many school districts across the United States, teachers report that typical professional development is ineffective (Hahn & Lester, 2012). Professional development that is not connected to teachers' needs and not structured appropriately does not necessarily support excellent teaching practices (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). Hellner (2008) asserted that "individual teacher learning and professional growth no longer keeps pace with change" (p. 50). Rismark and Solvberg (2011) added that "although teachers in fact find the dissemination of other teachers' knowledge to be a useful source of learning, studies show that knowledge sharing among teachers is scarce" (pp. 150–151).

PLCs provide a framework for continuous professional development (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012) that translates to increased teacher learning and professional growth.

According to DuFour et al. (2008), a PLC is a form of professional development in which educators are committed to working in collaboration to improve student achievement. Weiser (2012) added that PLCs exist when teachers come together to improve their practice for the benefit of their students.

PLCs "involve teachers in site-based, ongoing, collaborative professional development" (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012, p. 13) that is built on collaboration, collegial interactions, and the nurturing of relationships (Harris & Jones, 2010; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). The creation of a PLC means an end to teacher isolation, provides teachers autonomy over professional development needs, and promotes shared professional development learning environments (Hellner, 2008). Teachers learn when professional development in the school is structured to help them learn from one another as part of their routine teaching practice (DuFour, 2011). PLCs can yield positive results for teaching practices (Linder et al., 2012).

Many reasons exist as to why typical professional development hinders exemplary teaching and stifles teachers' professional learning experiences. Hahn and Lester (2012) stated that ineffective professional development programs fail to promote excellent teaching strategies and impact only a few teachers. Bausmith and Barry (2011) stressed that PLCs are "insufficiently focused on 'teacher expertise,' and they recommend 'scaling up' professional development in which pedagogical content knowledge is a primary focus" (p. 176).

According to Anderson and Herr (2011), Common Core standards could benefit from fine-tuning through PLCs (p. 287). ABC Elementary School (pseudonym) uses

PLCs as its method for providing teachers with ongoing professional learning opportunities and support for implementing the new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards.

At ABC Elementary School, a small urban elementary school located outside of metro Atlanta, 30 educators are required to participate in weekly PLCs. When adopting the practice of having weekly PLCs during the 2010–2011 school year, administrators at ABC Elementary School used DuFour et al.'s (2008) definition of PLCs to give the staff a clear understanding of the purpose for conducting these meetings. As Harris and Jones (2010) explained, "The PLC model is a way of ensuring that there is the opportunity for professionals to learn new practices and to generate new knowledge" (p. 173). DuFour et al. (2008) defined PLCs as "educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (p. 14).

At ABC Elementary School, PLC weekly meetings are typically held after school in the media center for approximately one hour. Teachers are asked to share and learn strategies that address the academic needs of the school based upon data collected from standardized tests and benchmark assessments. Topics of these meetings are chosen by administrators and can range from trainings on the latest computer software purchased by the school to mandatory in-services directed from the school district. Educators in these meetings are often encouraged and instructed to begin implementing new practices or research-based teaching strategies (Weiser, 2012) in their classroom instruction immediately.

Rarely will district officials come to ABC Elementary School to implement a PLC. ABC Elementary School's PLCs are usually facilitated by an administrator or teacher leader who received training from a district workshop prior to redelivering the information to staff members. During these weekly professional learning activities, there are ongoing professional development opportunities (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). Educators are asked to sit at rectangular tables with five colleagues to discuss, create, and problem solve about various topics. According to Maloney and Konza (2011), peer collaboration and interaction should be evident during PLCs. These meetings should facilitate "discussions about professional readings, student work and data, instructional practices and assessment techniques, and school improvement goals" (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012, p. 52).

In the 2 years following the implementation at ABC Elementary School, there seems to be no improvement in professional development. ABC Elementary School's PLC's structure is based on DuFour et al.'s (2008) definition. However, the implementation of ABC Elementary School's weekly PLC is flawed. Teachers continue to work in isolation. Furthermore, neither the school site nor the local district has evaluated this professional development program for its effectiveness or for the professional learning of teachers.

Although a few researchers have described teachers' perceptions of the PLC implementation process (DuFour et al., 2008), there is little data available regarding PLCs impact on teachers' professional learning experiences (Van Driel & Berry, 2012). For this reason, this study provided an in-depth discussion of teachers' learning

experiences utilizing an existing PLC model. Collection of these data may benefit ABC Elementary School and its school district by providing valuable insight into current professional development practices.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Teachers are required to participate in weekly professional learning; they are also encouraged to share ideas and strategies away from the weekly meetings. Even when collaboration is promoted through weekly meetings, teachers at ABC Elementary School appear to continue to work in isolation. Administrators at ABC Elementary School send out monthly surveys to teachers asking for suggestions on improving professional development activities at the school. Results from surveys indicate teachers are unsatisfied with the current professional development activities and want more professional development that is focused on differentiating instruction with the new Common Core Georgia Performance Standards. Furthermore, teachers appear to leave professional development activities complaining of wasted time. According to Tarnoczi (as cited in Maloney & Konza, 2011), "although these team planning activities are an important part of joint decision making, group cohesion and the smooth running of a school, they do not necessarily lead to the kind of professional reflection and debate integral to professional learning communities" (p. 76).

Since the implementation of PLCs at ABC Elementary School, administrators have encouraged collaboration in electronic communications with faculty and through the scheduling of common planning time. Although administrators send out surveys

soliciting feedback regarding professional development activities, no evaluation has occurred to adjust the current PLC model at ABC Elementary School to encourage collaboration.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Using a qualitative case study, I examined elementary school teachers' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of a PLC as it relates to professional growth and development. Effective PLCs occur in a collaborative setting where the main goal is to help students learn through continuous teacher learning (Van Driel & Berry, 2012). Although the literature reveals the academic effects of this practice for students (DuFour et al., 2008), few studies demonstrate how participation in PLCs result in professional growth for teachers (Van Driel & Berry, 2012) and increased collaboration.

Definitions

The following terms will be used during the course of this research and are defined for this study.

Common Core State Standards: Clear learning objectives for students that are the same at each grade level across the United States (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010).

Professional development: Guided learning opportunities that are designed to build and increase knowledge, skills, and practices associated with one's profession (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009).

Professional learning community (PLC): A team of educators who work together to increase student achievement and improve teaching practice (DuFour et al., 2008).

Significance

The purpose of the research was to examine elementary school teachers' perceptions concerning the effectiveness of a PLC as it relates to professional growth, development, and collaboration. I explored whether the PLC model of professional development implemented at ABC Elementary School is effective according to teachers at the research site. Based on teacher perceptions documented during the course of this case study, I hope to influence policy, practice, and future research regarding teachers' professional development, with specific regards to PLCs. The results of this study may promote social change by providing research on elementary teachers' perceptions on the effectiveness of PLCs. Teachers' perceptions of PLCs could be analyzed to determine the local program's strengths and weaknesses. This analysis could then be used to improve the professional development model being implemented at ABC Elementary School, which in turn may improve collaboration among teachers as well as increase teachers' learning, seemingly impacting student achievement in a positive manner.

Guiding/Research Question

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What are elementary school teachers' perceptions on the influence PLCs have on their classroom decisions?
2. What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the use of PLCs to increase teacher learning and collaboration?
3. What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the suggested collaborative opportunities that come about during the implementation of PLCs?

Review of the Literature

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine teachers' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of a PLC as it relates to professional growth and collaboration. This section includes a literature review of the following: theoretical framework, descriptions of PLCs, characteristics of PLCs, and benefits of PLCs.

The literature review for this case study included a variety of resources in an effort to achieve saturation on the topic of PLCs. Search terms such as *PLCs, learning communities, professional development, teacher collaboration, communities of practice, social learning, situated learning, teacher community,* and *teacher learning* helped me gather research from dissertations, websites, and peer-reviewed journals. Articles from peer-reviewed journals were located using the following databases: Academic Search Premier, EBSCO Publishing, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest Central, and Sage.

Theoretical Framework

The literature search revealed a number of theories that shed light on understanding how adults learn. Drawing on the theories of Bandura, Vygotsky, and Wenger, researchers have developed significant principles that explain how adults learn and develop. In addition to these theories, this study was based on Hord's (1997), DuFour et al.'s (2008), and DuFour's (2011) concepts of PLCs.

Social learning theory asserts that people learn in social settings while observing and interacting with others (Bandura, 1977). Bandura (1977) stated:

> Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. (p. 22)

Bandura's (1977) theory focuses on observation. Most human behavior is learned by observing and modeling. A key component of a PLC is that people learn by observing and modeling. In a PLC, people have the opportunity to engage in cooperative learning. Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development emphasizes peer collaboration and proposes that people are motivated to learn when encouraged and supported. In the zone of proximal development, people work together on various tasks that one person could not otherwise perform alone.

Additionally, Vygotsky's (1978) theories of development propose that learning is a social process, aided by people who are more capable. His concept of the zone of proximal development can be used to describe the interactions between people (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky argued that social interactions transform learning experiences. Teachers acquire knowledge over time while collaborating with others. For example, in PLCs teachers are given the opportunity to collaborate with teammates. They collaborate to help others improve their own learning and, in doing so, develop themselves professionally.

The final theory grounding this study was Wenger's social learning theory. Wenger's (2000) social learning theory focuses on learning as both an active and social

involvement. Wenger emphasized the concept "community of practice" as a condition for learning to occur that involves the construction and transfer of knowledge. Yakhlef (2010) explained, "In order for individuals to learn, they have to be participants in the social processes of everyday life of a community" (p. 40).

According to Prytula and Weiman (2012), "Social learning and learning in community with others is known to have significant impact on knowledge, the creation of knowledge, and knowledge of self" (p. 3). Communities of practice within organizations develop when people are engaged in a process of collective learning. Wenger's theory states that learning should be an important part of an individual's involvement in communities of practice. Cuddapah and Clayton (2011) noted, "Wenger contends that we become who we are as we learn through social interactions in practice" (p. 63). In PLCs, teachers collaborate in ongoing interactions with their colleagues. According to Desimone (2009), Wenger's concept "communities of practice" describes PLCs in which teachers have the opportunity to construct knowledge and apply new strategies.

Dufour et al. (2008) defined a PLC as educators working in collaboration to probe, discover, and share best practices for the purpose of increasing student achievement. Hord (1997) asserted that PLCs bring people together to work collaboratively. These professional communities offer opportunities for educators to think critically about their practice, resulting in new knowledge (Hord, 1997). When educators come together in an effort to learn and share ideas, professional growth and knowledge are the results. Gordon (2008) added that "knowledge is attained when people come

together to exchange ideas, articulate their problems from their own perspectives, and construct meanings that make sense to them" (p. 324).

According to Hord (1997), successful PLCs possess certain characteristics: a principal who involves staff members in the decision making process; a shared vision that is constantly communicated; cooperative learning and implementation of such learning among staff; observation and assessment of colleagues' teaching; and an environment and capable participants that support the PLCs vision. Similarly, Dufour et al. (2008), suggested all PLCs should have six similar characteristics. Individual PLCs should share a common mission, vision, values, and goals. They should also have a collaborative culture that focuses on learning and is action oriented. PLCs should also have participants who research best practices and current education trends and who are committed to improving education. Lastly, PLCs should be geared towards achieving results.

In order for teachers to provide students with the best education possible and improve student achievement, they must work together to discuss, share, and create ideas that are appropriate and will yield results for students. Dufour (2011) asserted, "when schools are organized to support the collaborative culture of a professional learning community, classroom teachers continue to have tremendous latitude" (p. 59). Educators who share common goals and who are willing to work together to achieve those goals will benefit. Educators who actively participate in PLCs will learn ideas and skills that could enable them to help their students. Mahn (1999) argued that people build new knowledge as they participate in the sharing of ideas.

Professional Learning Community

DuFour et al. (2008) defined PLCs as "educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (p. 14). Hilliard (2012) defined these groups as a team of members who collaborate on a regular basis to improve their learning as well as the learning experiences of their students. The underlying practices of PLCs include the use of collaboration to improve schools (Van Driel & Berry, 2012) that embraces a shared vision, collaborative culture, self-reflection, and shared leadership (Weiser, 2012).

According to Caskey and Carpenter (2012), a PLC is an organizational model for teacher learning. Teachers within PLCs share classroom practices in hopes to improve their own teaching practices. PLCs provide teachers the opportunity to be learners (Weiser, 2012) and enable teachers to work collaboratively to promote ongoing growth and improvement for themselves and their students (Barton & Stepanek, 2012). PLCs provide a structure for ongoing professional development and shift the focus on what is being taught to what students are learning (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). Teachers use their collective knowledge in decision-making, have a sense of purpose, engage in collaborative work, and accept joint responsibility for the outcomes of their work (Harris & Jones, 2010, p. 174).

Van Driel and Berry (2012) stressed that professional development for teachers should be built on collaboration, collegial interactions, and the fostering of relationships. The idea of a PLC is based on a group of teachers working together through the

articulation of shared vision, values, and goals (Harris & Jones, 2010) to improve classroom practice and enhance student learning (Blanton & Perez, 2011; DuFour, 2011).

Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community

Teachers are no longer working alone to increase student achievement. Teachers are moving from "a tradition of isolation to a culture of collaboration" (DuFour et al., 2008, p. 27). According to Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (1995), a PLC is an important part of school improvement that keeps teachers and administrators focused on teaching and learning (Elbousty & Bratt, 2010). Within PLCs, teams of teachers collaborate to discover research-based teaching strategies that will improve student learning. DuFour et al. (2008) noted, "Educators create an environment that fosters shared understanding, a sense of identity, high levels of involvement, mutual cooperation, collective responsibility, emotional support, and a strong sense of belonging as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (p. 20).

Researchers have described key characteristics for the development of PLCs (DuFour et al., 2008; Hord, 1997). Hord (as cited in Elbousty & Bratt, 2010) identified five characteristics of PLCs "1) supportive and shared leadership, in which teachers and administrators collaborate in decision making; 2) shared values and vision centering upon students' learning; 3) collective learning and application of learning, as teachers collaborate and learn from each other on a quotidian or daily basis; 4) supportive conditions, as the school environment plays a role in community development; 5) shared personal practice, as teachers discuss their teaching practices with specific students and emerging challenges" (para 6). DuFour et al. (2008) identified similar characteristics of

PLCs: “1) shared mission, vision, values, and goals all focused on student learning; 2) a collaborative culture with a focus on learning; 3) collective inquiry into best practice and current reality; 4) action orientation: learning by doing; 5) a commitment to continuous improvement; and 6) results orientation” (pp. 15–17).

With these characteristics in place, the school becomes a community of learners in which teachers share in the instructional decisions to meet the needs of students (Barton & Stepanek, 2012). PLCs are established to create a group within a school where collaboration is the norm (Elbousty & Bratt, 2010). In creating PLCs, the values and goals of a school are shared among the staff, students, and community. According to Hellner (2008), a “ professional learning community requires learners to work actively with new knowledge: drawing on prior knowledge and experiences; discussing, sharing, reflecting with other learners; modifying and adjusting beliefs and practices; and applying them to the specific school setting” (p. 51).

Benefits of a Professional Learning Community

Based on the literature, PLCs are beneficial because they help to create an environment of sharing ideas that improve teaching and learning. Research provides strong support for improving schools and districts as a result of teachers participating in PLCs (DuFour et al., 2008). Englert and Tarrant (1995) examined the development of a learning community in which three special education teachers collaborated with researchers from Michigan University to create a literacy curriculum for disabled elementary students. In their case study, Englert and Tarrant (1995) observed changes in the three teachers’ classroom practices. Of those three special education teachers, one

made considerable changes to her practices. Similarly, Andrews and Lewis (2002) found teachers increased their learning and improved their classroom practices through communication and interaction with their colleagues during PLCs.

PLCs are designed to create a positive effect on teachers and students (DuFour, 2011). PLCs can produce positive effects on teachers and their instruction, which in turn can lead to improved student performance (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012). Teachers' classroom practices improve as a result of their participation in PLCs. A PLC is a group of connected and engaged educators who will help improve student learning (Harris & Jones, 2010). PLCs have "helped teachers learn together as they rethink their practice, challenge existing assumptions about instruction, and reexamine their students' learning needs" (Barton & Stepanek, 2012, p. 2). Research findings demonstrate that teachers improve their classroom practices when working in PLCs, and outcomes for students improve when their teachers are part of PLCs (Blanton & Perez, 2011).

According to Weiser (2012), a PLC can provide the support system that teachers need to grow professionally and to form networks that will benefit them as well as their students. Hord (1997) contended that teachers who feel supported in their own continuous learning and classroom practice are more committed and effective than those who do not feel supported (Hellner, 2008). Furthermore, Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) found that teachers working together during professional learning activities cultivate school change that spreads throughout and beyond their classrooms.

Educators report benefits to working in PLCs (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). Jackson and Street (2005) noted a positive impact of PLCs in changed teaching practices

and teachers' behaviors, which include greater confidence, enthusiasm for collaboration, and greater commitment to trying something new (Hellner, 2008). A PLC is an opportunity for educators to learn new practices and generate new knowledge (Harris & Jones, 2010). When discussing their findings on PLCs, Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) added that "intensive professional development, especially when it includes applications of knowledge to teachers' planning and instruction, has a greater chance of influencing teaching practices" (p. 9).

According to Dallas (2006), teachers participating in PLCs feel connected to and supported by their colleagues and become more effective at curriculum planning (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012). PLCs require collective teacher learning that ultimately benefits students (DuFour et al., 2008). For PLCs to be effective, they must indicate improved student learning. Positive student impacts were reported in a study of professional learning teams in the Wake County School System that indicated that 81% of teachers surveyed believed that their students learned more as a result of teachers participating in PLCs (Barton & Stepanek, 2012).

Wood and Whitford (2010) emphasized the importance of teachers working collaboratively in PLCs to meet the needs of students (Blanton & Perez, 2011). PLCs allow educators "to customize and personalize their professional development, and they can develop a sense of ownership through self-directed learning" (Linder et al., 2012, p. 20). Hord (1997) found positive outcomes for teachers: reduced isolation, job satisfaction, higher morale, less absenteeism, and academic gains for students (Hellner, 2008). In PLCs, there is great value in teachers learning and sharing ideas with colleagues

to increase student achievement (Weiser, 2012). Barton and Stepanek (2012) noted, "When teachers engage with their colleagues around what really matters in teaching and learning, rather than treating their classrooms as a private domain, both student and teacher benefit" (p. 4).

Past studies have found PLCs to be beneficial to teachers. However, the thought of a collaborative environment can be applied negatively (Dufour, 2011). Wood (2007) conducted a case study to explore the challenges a mid-Atlantic school district faced to sustaining PLCs. The researcher discovered that "although the initiative sought to establish learning communities to mobilize practitioner expertise and build collective responsibility, most participants did not claim a connection between their collaborative work and student learning" (Wood, 2007, p. 700). Instead of educators using PLCs as a platform for growth and learning, some use it as a time to "make excuses for low student achievement" (Dufour, 2011) or discuss issues that are not related to students. Likewise, Wood (2007) found that more time was spent building camaraderie among teachers and partnerships in the community, rather than focusing on professional development that would improve classroom practices.

Implications

PLCs can modify the standards in school, thus initiating change in school climate and culture, as well as school and instructional practices (Lippy & Zamora, 2012–2013). With knowledge gained from this study, I designed a series of professional development workshops for teachers and administrators on implementing and sustaining PLCs in an educational setting.

Summary

PLCs are an effective form of teacher professional development. A PLC is a type of professional development that provides educators the opportunity to work together to improve student achievement (DuFour et al., 2008). It has been documented that participation in PLCs positively influence teachers' learning, professional growth, and classroom practices (Andrews & Lewis, 2002; Blanton & Perez, 2011; Englert & Tarrant, 1995; Linder et al., 2012).

Administrators and teacher leaders at ABC Elementary School facilitate weekly PLCs to provide teachers with professional learning opportunities and support with implementing a new curriculum. However, teachers at ABC Elementary School continue to learn, plan, and work in isolation. I examined teachers' perceptions of PLCs by addressing the research questions.

The literature review for this case study included a variety of resources in an effort to achieve saturation on the topic of PLCs. Search terms such as PLCs, learning communities, professional development, teacher collaboration, and teacher learning helped me gather research from dissertations, websites, books, and peer-reviewed journals. Section 1 contained an introduction and purpose for the study. The qualitative research design chosen for this study is explained in Section 2.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

I chose a qualitative case study research design to examine teachers' perceptions of PLCs. A qualitative case is "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam, 2009, p. 45). The qualitative case study design enabled me to collect data in a manner that assisted in answering my three research questions: (a) What are elementary school teachers' perceptions on the influence PLCs have on their classroom decisions? (b) What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the use of PLCs to increase teacher learning and collaboration? and (c) What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the suggested collaborative opportunities that come about during the implementation of PLCs? I collected detailed, in-depth data by conducting interviews to gain insight into teachers' perceptions of PLCs. A case study is a thorough explanation and analysis of one object, occurance, or group (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). In this case study, I examined the perceptions of teachers within a social unit, a local elementary school's PLC.

This study focuses on describing, interpreting, and explaining individual experiences; therefore, a qualitative approach was appropriate to gain a greater understanding of participants' perceptions. A quantitative approach was not appropriate because I was not interested in variables and relationships (Glesne, 2011). Additionally, my research questions are not narrow, measurable, or observable (Creswell, 2009, 2012). This study involved rich, thick descriptions (Creswell, 2012) of teachers' perceptions of

PLCs. Furthermore, I selected a qualitative research design to conduct a more in-depth study on a small group of people (Creswell, 2012; Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010).

Researchers identify and describe various types of qualitative research designs including, but not limited to: ethnography, case study, phenomenological, and grounded theory (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). Ethnography researchers study a cultural group in their natural setting for an extended period of time (Creswell, 2009) in an effort to provide a clear picture of the group, its behaviors, and environment (Lodico et al., 2010). In order for ethnographers to paint a vivid scene of a group, the group's behaviors, and environment, they must immerse themselves into the research site. Researchers who use this method not only interview participants, they also spend a considerable amount of time observing participants in their natural setting in an effort to understand them better (Merriam, 2009). The ethnographic model was not useful to my study because I did not need to be immersed in my research site in order to collect data from participants.

On the other hand, phenomenological researchers seek to identify and understand the experience of an event from the descriptions of the events' participants (Creswell, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010). To gain a better understanding of participants' views of PLCs, I did not need to spend time observing and communicating with participants prior to the one-on-one interviews (Lodico et al., 2010). This characteristic of a phenomenological study makes this particular method inappropriate for my study. Communicating with my participants prior to conducting the interviews would not be useful to my study because I did not want to influence participants' perspectives of PLCs.

Researchers who employ the grounded theory method continually collect and analyze data for connections and links they can form into possible theories (Glesne, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Albeit both the grounded theory and case study methods require researchers to collect and analyze data (Merriam, 2009), grounded theorists continually review collected data in the hopes of formulating a practical theory (Lodico et al., 2010). The grounded theory method was not appropriate for my study because the rich, thick descriptions I used were "not the primary focus of this type of study" (Merriam, 2009, p. 29).

Although there are several types of qualitative designs, I chose to conduct a qualitative case study because I examined a small group of educators within a social setting during an extended period of time. According to Lodico et al. (2010), "case study research is a form of qualitative research that endeavors to discover meaning, to investigate processes, and to gain insight and in-depth understanding of an individual, group, or situation" (p. 269). Likewise, case study researchers conduct in-depth explorations of individuals, groups, or programs that are connected by time or an activity, in an effort to provide rich, detailed descriptions (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011).

Setting and Sample

The setting for this qualitative case study was an elementary school in an urban school district. The school district is one of the largest school districts in the state and serves approximately 99,000 students and employs about 13,000 employees. ABC Elementary School and the study's participants were selected using the purposeful

sampling technique. Purposeful sampling requires the researcher to select a setting or participants based on the understanding that this selection will help the researcher make sense of the problem or research question (Creswell, 2009).

An IRB application was submitted to Walden University requesting permission to conduct the study. An IRB application was also submitted to the district's department of research requesting permission to conduct the study. Following approval to conduct research, I scheduled a meeting with the administrator of ABC Elementary School to explain the details of the study. During this meeting, I requested the names and phone numbers of potential participants who met the study's criteria. I contacted potential participants with an invitation to participate in the study. I then distributed and collected potential participants' informed consent forms using privacy envelopes. I contacted the selected participants to schedule a date, time, and location to conduct my one-on-one interviews. I selected participants based on their ability to help me answer my three research questions. Participants for this study were chosen using the following criteria: (a) participant was a certified teacher who teaches students in Grades K through 5; (b) participant was a teacher at ABC Elementary School; and (c) participant had participated in PLCs at ABC Elementary School for at least 2 years.

ABC Elementary School was chosen because teachers continue to work in isolation even though the school has an existing PLC. Approximately 30 educators at ABC Elementary School serve more than 400 students in Grades K through 5. The educators at ABC Elementary School participate in weekly PLCs to discuss various topics and plan activities. I selected seven teachers from ABC Elementary School who

have participated in the school's PLCs for at least 2 years. The seven teachers selected are from different grade levels or departments within the school and have varying years of teaching experience. Selecting participants from different grade levels or departments allowed me to gather data from multiple perspectives, therefore adding to the validity of my study.

Utilizing the aforementioned setting and participant criteria provided me an opportunity to collect and analyze elementary school teachers' perceptions of PLCs. Data collected from elementary school teachers who served in various roles within the school and participated during weekly PLCs provided useful information about and insight into elementary school teachers' perceptions of PLCs. Participants included educators from different grade levels, as well as different departments. Elementary school teachers who served students in Grades K through 5 from the general education, special education, and special areas departments were asked to participate in the study. Collecting data from seven participants who served different roles provided an opportunity to analyze data from multiple perspectives.

Instrumentation and Materials

During this study, I used an interview protocol while conducting semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to collect data to answer my research questions (see Appendix B). A semi-structured interview is one in which the researcher prepares questions prior to the interview but has the authority to deviate from his or her interview protocol based on participants' responses (Glesne, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010). All data collection for this study occurred during these semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with the study's

seven participants. The data for this study included demographic information about participants' teaching background, education, and experiences, as well as detailed accounts of their perceptions regarding PLCs and collaboration (see Appendix B).

Participants signed an Informed Consent Form before any data collection began. There were minimal risks to participants, no greater than that experienced in daily life. The Informed Consent Form included the following information: my name, the university sponsoring my study, the purpose of my study, possible benefits and risks of participating in the study, the extent of participant involvement, a confidentiality agreement, a guarantee that participants may remove themselves from the study at any time, and the name and contact information of my university chair.

Interviews were conducted to provide me with greater insight into teachers' perceptions, while allowing the respondents to freely and openly voice their opinions. Several researchers have collected data for their qualitative case studies by using only interviews. For example, Cudré-Mauroux (2011) used interviews to gain a better understanding of people who work with those who have learning disabilities. Similarly, Crepeau-Hobson & Summers (2011) noted of their research, "a case study was conducted in which interviews were utilized to facilitate an increased understanding of the experiences of state team members responding to a school-based crisis event and how crisis teams attempted a coordinated response" (p. 281). Furthermore, in Meffe, Moravac, and Espin's (2012) qualitative case study, semi-structured interviews allowed the participants to describe their own experiences, while at the same time maintain a similar focus across interviews.

I devised and implemented an interview protocol to assist with data collection and guide the interview (Lodico et al., 2010). An interview protocol consists of guidelines for the interview process, questions that will be addressed during the interview, and space for the researcher to take notes (Creswell, 2012; Jacobs & Furgerson, 2012). The interview protocol used for this study was modeled after Creswell's (2012) interview protocol (see Appendix B). Creswell's (2012) interview protocol allows flexibility for researchers to incorporate research questions pertaining to their particular study. My interview protocol contained a brief summary of the interview's purpose, descriptive information about the interview and participants, and questions I posed during the interview.

The interview questions were constructed to assist in answering the research questions. The interview questions were then examined and approved by my university chair, second chair, and university research reviewer (URR). During the interview, I took detailed notes and recorded the entire conversation. After each interview, the subsequent voice recordings were transcribed by connecting the digital recorder to a computer with Dragon software, a computer program that translates voice recordings to text (Nuance Communications, 2013).

Data Collection and Analysis

In an effort to maintain participants' confidentiality, data gathered as a result of this study will remain confidential during the course of the study (Creswell, 2012). I took the following precautions to ensure participants' confidentiality. Rather than send the interview recordings to a company that transcribes voice recordings to text, I transcribed the interviews using a computer program called Dragon Speech Recognition Software

that translates digital voice recordings to text (Nuance Communications, 2013). By personally transcribing the interview voice recordings using Nuance Communications' (2013) software, I did not expose any potential identifying information of the participants to others. This not only protected the identity of my participants, it also protected the identity of my research site. While conducting this study, I caused minimal disruptions to the site and respected the site and participants' confidentiality by conducting interviews after hours at a different location. I conducted two of the one-on-one participant interviews at a book store. A restaurant was also used to conduct two of the participant interviews. The remaining three participant interviews were conducted at a coffee shop. The data collection process lasted approximately 3 to 4 weeks, with each individual interview taking 45 minutes to an hour.

After I collected all data for the purposes of this study, I organized the transcribed interviews and corresponding field notes to analyze the data and search for common themes. I used a qualitative data analysis computer program called QDA Miner Lite to store and organize data, assign codes to the data, and search for themes (Creswell, 2012). QDA Miner Lite is free computer software that assists researchers with analyzing and coding written texts using Boolean searches and proximity operator words such as "includes, enclosed, near, before, and after" (Provalis Research, 2014). I reported the findings of my qualitative case study, including any discrepant findings through the use of rich, thick descriptions in a narrative discussion (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010).

During the data collection process, I stored participants' informed consent forms, interview notes, and the digital voice recorder in a locking file cabinet located in my home. I saved and stored all transcribed interviews in two locations, a password protected computer in my home and a password protected USB drive. All data collected as a result of the study will be stored in a secure location for 5 years and then destroyed. After 5 years, I will shred all paperwork associated with my research study using a personal shredder located in my home. Furthermore, I will wipe the USB drive clean by erasing all data, transcriptions, and notes from my study.

This qualitative case study contained potential weaknesses or limitations (Creswell, 2012) due to my biases. My beliefs and experiences may influence the manner in which I interpreted the data and consequently, the results of my case study. In the interest of full disclosure, I have been a classroom teacher and the gifted teacher for the study site during the implementation of this study. Therefore, I will continue to participate in professional development activities at ABC Elementary School. I have never served in an administrative capacity towards faculty and staff at ABC Elementary School, thus eliminating any potential conflict of interest. My non-administrative position at the study site did not affect data collection or influence participants' responses to survey and interview questions. Although I am employed at the research site, participants' confidentiality remained intact through guidelines addressed in the informed consent form.

I adhered to IRB guidelines and followed the school district's policy of obtaining approval to conduct the study. Permission was granted from the district's Office of

Research and Assessment. The teachers who chose to participate in the study were asked to sign an informed consent form. The participants were informed about data collection procedures and potential risks of the study, as recommended by Creswell (2012). No additional data were requested and obtained from the school or district's Office of Research and Assessment.

Creswell (2012) defined validity as "the degree to which all of the evidence points to the intended interpretation" (p. 159). By using participants who serve different roles within in the study's setting, I triangulated the data from these different perspectives. I used participants who teach different grade levels. For example, I did not select all seven participants from the third grade teaching staff. I also selected participants who teach in different departments. For example, I did not choose all seven participants from the general education department or the special education department. Triangulating data from multiple perspectives increases the validity of the data, findings, and conclusions produced from a study (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Lodico et al., 2010). To confirm the research's findings, I examined data from multiple sources, in this case the interview participants. Merriam (2009) explained, "Triangulation using multiple sources of data means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives" (p. 216).

To further validate my study's findings, I asked participants to complete a process known as member checking. In this process, the study's participants review interview findings and their data included in the findings to check for accuracy of their account

(Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011). Participants completed the member checking process near the end of the study after all of the data had been analyzed. I printed a copy of the study's findings for each participant to ensure I had accurately reflected the views they expressed during their one-on-one interview. I met with each participant individually to review his or her responses. I used this opportunity to clarify responses and check the accurary of reported findings. The participants checked the information for accuracy and confirmed the findings. Participants believed that the themes reflected their experiences. Therefore, I did not have to make any additions or changes to the findings.

Additionally, I employed the use of a peer reviewer to ensure that I had reported the findings of my case study accurately and truthfully (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). The peer reviewer was a colleague who possesses her education doctorate degree. The peer reviewer was able to identify discrepant data that may threaten the credibility of the study. For example, Participant 1 perceived some elements of PLC interactions negatively. The participant's perceptions were identified as a discrepant case that contradicted the themes. I did not force the data to match the themes, nor did I ignore the data that did not fit into the themes. Although the data that had any discrepancies were re-examined and excluded from data analysis, I reported it in a matrix (Appendix D) to ensure reliability of the findings.

Findings

The research findings for this study were based on elementary teachers' perceptions of PLCs. I examined seven teachers' perceptions of the influence PLCs have on their classroom decisions, the use of PLCs to increase teacher learning and

collaboration, and the suggested collaborative opportunites that come about during the implementation of PLCs. The three research questions served as a framework for the development of the eight interview questions. When posed to the study's seven participants, these interview questions and the participants' responses generated the data collected during this study.

Interview Question 1: Could you please describe your background in education? I wanted to know the level of education and the amount of teaching experience each participant had. Interview Question 1 corresponded with Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

Interview Question 2: You have been participating in a professional learning community for the past 2 years. Based on your experiences and what you know about professional learning communities, what do you feel are its' strengths and weaknesses as a model of professional development? I wanted to know what elementary school teachers perceive to be effective and ineffective components of the PLC model of professional development. Interview Question 2 corresponded with Research Question 1.

Interview Question 3: What are your views on collaborating with colleagues? Follow-up question: How has collaboration helped or hindered your professional growth as an educator? I wanted to know the perceptions of elementary school teachers on collaborating with their colleagues as it pertains to their professional growth. Interview Question 3 corresponds with Research Questions 2 and 3.

Interview Question 4: Professional learning communities require participants to learn, plan, and work together, or collaborate. Describe your professional learning community experiences as they relate to collaborating with your colleagues. I wanted to

know the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the collaborative culture PLCs provided. Interview Question 4 corresponded with Research Questions 2 and 3.

Interview Question 5: Tell me how your participation in professional learning communities has influenced the decisions you make regarding classroom instruction. I wanted to know the perceptions of elementary school teachers on whether or not PLCs have influenced their classroom teaching practices. Interview Question 5 corresponded with Research Question 1.

Interview Question 6: Please describe ways in which your participation in professional learning communities has impacted the decisions you make regarding classroom management. I wanted to know the perceptions of elementary school teachers on whether or not PLCs have influenced their classroom management. Interview Question 6 corresponded with Research Question 1.

Interview Question 7: Do you believe the collaboration that occurs during professional learning community meetings have the ability to increase teachers' learning and professional growth? Why or why not? I wanted to know the perceptions of elementary school teachers on whether or not the collaborative opportunities PLCs provide have the abilty to increase learning for teachers. Interview Question 7 corresponded with Research Questions 2 and 3.

Interview Question 8: What suggestions, if any do you have for improving your current professional learning community? Follow-up question: What are some things you would not change about your professional learning community? I wanted to know

elementary school teachers' thoughts on improving their PLC. Interview Question 8 corresponded with Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

The data generated as a result of this study were gathered from seven elementary school teachers with varied levels of teaching experiences and backgrounds.

- Participant 1: 21 years of lower and upper elementary teaching experience; master's degree.
- Participant 2: 12 years of upper elementary teaching experience; education doctorate degree.
- Participant 3: 22 years of upper elementary teaching experience; education specialist degree.
- Participant 4: 7 years of lower and upper elementary teaching experience; bachelor's degree.
- Participant 5: 14 years of lower and upper elementary teaching experience; master's degree.
- Participant 6: 4 years of lower elementary teaching experience; bachelor's degree.
- Participant 7: 26 years of lower and upper elementary teaching experience; bachelor's degree.

Perceptions of the Influence PLCs Have on Classroom Decisions

In this section, I address the first research question: "What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the influence PLCs have on their classroom decisions?" The information provided is based on participants' responses specifically to Interview

Question 5, which asked about how their participation in PLCs has influenced the decisions they make regarding classroom instruction, but additional information was drawn from responses to Interview Question 6, which asked teachers to describe ways in which their participation in PLCs have impacted the decisions they make regarding classroom management.

During the interviews, all seven participants agreed that PLCs influenced their classroom decisions they make regarding classroom instruction. Participant 1 stated that PLCs made her a better teacher by listening to other teachers. Participant 2 mentioned that PLCs have helped in learning various instructional programs. Participant 3 stated that her participation in PLCs has influenced the decisions she makes in her classroom in a positive way. Participant 3 reflected: "By participating in PLCs, I have learned to take ownership of my learning, which has caused me to change my instruction. I focus on learning and teaching; not just teaching practices." Participant 4 believed that she had learned some great small group and differentiated instruction strategies during PLCs. Participant 5 stated that PLCs have allowed her to monitor student progress on grade level goals and improved her teaching and student learning. Participants 6 and 7 mentioned how PLCs impact the curriculum. Participant 6 reflected: "My classroom instruction is influenced by the discussions during PLCs because we sit down together and use county curriculum maps to plan special lessons, projects, and upcoming units." Participant 7 reflected: "Well through PLCs, we've set and reviewed learning goals for our students, planned lessons, field trips, and other learning activities that have influenced what I do in my classroom."

In addition, when I asked participants to describe ways in which their participation in PLCs have impacted the decisions they make regarding classroom management, the responses were very similar. Participant 1 stated that PLCs have made her realize that if rituals and routines are not established early, she will experience problems with classroom management. Participant 2 did not feel as though PLCs impacted her classroom management practices. She seemed to believe that she was pretty good with managing her students. Participant 3 found that working with colleagues during PLCs has shed light on the importance of sharing responsibility for students' behavior. Participant 3 reflected: "My colleagues and I collaborate to address classroom management issues." Participant 4 stated that some classroom management strategies work and others do not. Participant 4 further stated that there are less behavior problems from students who have strong teachers with strong classroom management skills. Participant 5 mentioned that teacher–student relationships are critical to a successful classroom. Participant 5 reflected: "We collaborate on rules, policies, and procedures that we want in place for our students in classrooms and on our grade level." Participant 6 added: "As a grade level we have similar, if not the same, classroom rules and consequences for the students on our grade level." Participant 7 mentioned that she had learned several classroom management techniques through years of trial and error, but some by participating in PLCs. Participant 7 reflected: "The ones I've learned about in PLCs most recently have definitely worked because they incorporate technology and behavior monitoring."

Perceptions of PLCs to Increase Teacher Learning and Collaboration

In this section, I address the second research question: "What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the use of PLCs to increase teacher learning and collaboration?" The information is based on participants' responses to Interview Questions 4 and 7, which asked about teacher learning and collaboration.

Interview Question 4: "Describe your professional learning community experiences as it relates to collaborating with your colleagues." Participant 1 replied: "My professional learning community could be great if I had others willing to put in work without complaining." However, Participants 2–7 stated their professional learning community experiences are very positive. Participant 2 cited that during PLCs colleagues often created lessons together, shared ideas, and learned from each other. Participant 3 mentioned that most of her colleagues shared the same goals. Participant 3 stated: "Sitting down as a team and engaging in ongoing discussions, I feel that this really increases my commitment to the goals of the school."

Participant 4 commented: "Because my schedule is different from the teachers of the students I serve, I usually have to meet up with the teachers after school. I like being part of the planning process and sharing ideas with grade level teachers, but I seldom get the chance to do those things because of time constraints. I do have other PLCs meetings with teachers from the Special Education department where I do get a chance to hear and share ideas."

Participant 5 stated that working together to analyze classroom practices is a learning experience in itself. Participant 5 reflected: "We capitalize on our strengths and

use it to collaborate on units, lessons, and overall ideas." Participant 6 commented: "I believe we work well together when it comes to sharing idease and planning units or lessons for our students." Participant 7 added: "Occassionally we will have a gripe session that is not focused on what we should be doing, but for the most part we focus on the task at hand and get the job done."

Perceptions of Suggested Collaborative Opportunities of PLCs

In this section, I address the third research question: "What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the suggested collaborative opportunities that come about during the implementation of PLCs?" It was based on participants' responses to Interview Questions 4, 7, and 8. Participant 1 felt that everyone should have something to offer by participating in PLCs. Participant 1 commented: "To improve my professional learning community, I plan to bring optimism, new information, and ideas." Participant 2 stated that PLCs are important to professional growth because teachers learn by doing and applying things they get from other teachers. Participants 3, 4, and 5 commented on the importance of collaboration during PLCs. Participant 3 mentioned: "Collaboration can increase teachers' learning and professional growth because teachers collaborate with one another to develop lesson plans, address individual students' learning needs, and share best practices." Participant 4 replied: "People learn from others and teachers are no different. We learn by watching and imitating what we see or hear works in someone else's classroom." Participant 5 shared that theories, research models, and strategies are often used as teachers collaborate in PLCs. Participants 6 and 7 believed that everyone should contribute ideas in PLCs. Participant 6 mentioned that if teachers are involved and

engaged, they can grow and develop in the profession. Participant 7 echoed that sentiment by stating, “Everyone must take an active role in the collaboration process.”

As each participant in this study had similar experiences as a teacher participating in PLCs, I identified four common themes that underscore similarities among these seven elementary teachers: collaboration, involvement, teacher learning, and time.

Four Identified Themes

Further analysis of the data led to the identification of four common themes. The first theme identified the importance of collaboration in PLCs. The second theme dealt with involvement during PLCs. The third theme focused on teacher learning. The fourth theme focused on time needed for PLCs.

Collaboration. The first theme that emerged from the data was the importance of collaboration. All seven participants expressed positive experiences in collaboration with colleagues. They stated that their colleagues collaborated on lesson plans, classroom rules, and teaching strategies. They expressed appreciation for opportunities to learn with and from their colleagues. For example, participants reported that their knowledge was increased when they discussed different techniques they used to help students master the Common Core Standards. Participant 1 stated that collaborative planning is so important. Participant 2 reflected: “Being able to hear various perspectives gives us all some support with our ideas and how to apply them.” Participant 3 commented: “My colleagues and I are more valuable collectively than on my own. I learn from my colleagues.” Participant 4 stated: “I think it’s great that we have a platform to share ideas, information, and strategies with our colleagues.” Participant 5 commented: “It is difficult to collaborate

with people who do not want to collaborate." Participant 6 enjoyed collaborating with colleagues and feel collaborating has helped her grow professionally. Participant 6 stated that collaborative discussions and planning sessions are definitely strengths. Participant 7 believed that collaborating with colleagues is an awesome way to share, plan, and learn with one another. Participant 7 reflected: "A strength of participating in PLCs is coming together with my colleagues to share knowledge, ideas, and strategies about how students learn and best practices to implement in our classrooms."

Involvement. The involvement during PLCs was the second theme that evolved from the data. Participants 1–7 perceived involvement in PLCs as a positive component of PLCs. Participants mentioned that collaboration would be ideal if everyone was involved. Participant 2 stated that some teachers are not open to sharing in PLCs because it can be intimidating for some to give their perspective on an educational approach. Participant 3 stated that teachers are not given enough time to be involved and share ideas. Participant 4 mentioned that the level of involvement from everyone is not consistent or equal. Participant 5 stated that administrators are not as involved as they should be. Participant 6 commented: "There are different levels of commitment and attention some of my colleagues give during PLCs." Participant 7 stated that all teachers should be actively engaged during PLCs.

Teacher learning. Teacher learning during PLCs was the third theme that evolved from the data. Participants 1–7 perceived teacher learning in PLCs as a necessary component of PLCs. They believed that PLCs provided opportunities for them to learn and positively impacted their classroom practices. Participant 1 mentioned that getting

fresh ideas from colleagues and discussing some of your strengths can help teachers learn. Participant 2 stated that teachers are able to get others' interpretations of the right way to use information in the classroom. Participant 3 reflected: "PLCs reduce teacher isolation, create shared responsibilities among teachers, provide a forum for learning as a team, and improve teaching and learning." Participants 4, 5, 6, and 7 felt that sharing in PLCs can contribute to teacher learning.

Time. Time was the final theme. When analyzing the responses given by the participants, I concluded that more time was needed for PLCs. Participant 1 believed that time was important during PLCs. Participant 2 stated that some teachers have to find the time to participate in PLCs. Participant 3 mentioned that some teachers are not given enough time during the school day to participate in PLCs. Participant 4 echoed that there are teachers who cannot meet for PLCs. Participant 5 added that there was not enough time to become actively engaged in PLC discussions. Participant 6 felt that more time should be allowed to have every teacher available to contribute to discussions during PLCs. Participant 7 agreed that time was definitely needed so that teachers could fully participate. Although participants valued PLCs, they did not feel that there was enough time provided for PLCs.

Summary of Findings

As documented in this section, data from interviews were used to identify common patterns and themes. The research questions were used to gain insight into the topic of PLCs. The summary of the findings is grouped according to the research questions that guided the project study, ending with the discussion of the themes.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, "What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the influence PLCs have on their classroom decisions?" To answer this question, data were collected to explore participants' perceptions on the influence PLCs have on their classroom decisisons.

Participants' perceptions on the influence PLCs have on their classroom decisions indicated that PLCs have a positive influence on classroom decisions regarding instruction and classroom management. Findings indicated that participants had very positive responses about the influence PLCs have on teachers' classroom decisions. They all noted the importance of PLCs in helping with instruction and classroom management.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the use of PLCs to increase teacher learning and collaboration?" To answer this question, data were collected to explore participants' perceptions on the use of PLCs to increase teacher learning and collaboration.

Participants' perceptions on the use of PLCs to increase teacher learning and collaboration indicated that PLCs help increase teacher learning and collaboration. Findings indicated that participants felt that PLCs have helped their professional growth as educators. Participants stated that teacher learning and collaboration were necessary in PLCs. The ability to learn and collaborate was seen as critical in implementing PLCs.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, "What are the perceptions of elementary school teachers on the suggested collaborative opportunities that come about during the implementation of PLCs?" To answer this question, data were collected to explore participants' perceptions on the suggested collaborative opportunities that come about during the implementation of PLCs.

Participants' perceptions on the suggested collaborative opportunities that come about during the implementation of PLCs have improved teacher learning and collaboration. Findings indicated that participants have learned to collaborate in PLCs. The biggest factor in collaborating was having the time to collaborate in PLCs. Collaborating provided teachers with access to colleagues to go over lesson plans, share classroom ideas, discuss student behavioral issues, or just listen to each other.

Themes

Collaboration, involvement, teacher learning, and time were identified as common themes in the project study. The themes that emerged from the data indicated that elementary teachers believed that collaboration, involvement, teacher learning, and time were important components of PLCs.

Collaboration was the first theme identified by elementary teachers. The participants in this study stressed the importance of collaboration. Elementary teachers reported that collaboration was an important factor in PLCs.

Involvement was the second theme identified by elementary teachers. The participants revealed that their PLCs need everyone to be involved. Participant 4 pointed

out that teacher involvement was not consistent. It was further noted that teachers were not fully engaged in PLC discussions.

Teacher learning was the third theme identified by elementary teachers. The participants believed that teacher learning increased during PLCs. As important as it was for the teachers to feel like an equal member of the team by sharing classroom ideas, it was equally important for teachers to recognize the learning opportunities that arose from collaborating.

Time was the final theme identified by elementary teachers. The findings were consistent with that of DuFour et al. (2011) that suggested that schools are not providing enough time for teachers to participate in PLCs. Teachers at this elementary school reported that time was a major issue they faced. These teachers were concerned with their planning time being taken up with other meetings. Other responsibilities such as district meetings often disrupted the consistency of the PLCs. Participants believed that measures should be made to ensure enough time for teachers to work with colleagues during PLCs.

A professional development opportunity may be a possible addition for PLCs that do not explicitly focus on collaboration, involvement, teacher learning, and time. Implementing PLCs may not be enough to increase teacher learning and collaboration. Through this investigation into the experiences of seven elementary teachers, it was evident that their PLCs could place more emphasis on more collaboration, involvement, teacher learning, and time.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 describes the project that was created to address the problem identified in Section 1. It also includes the project goals and provides a justification for the project based upon the data collected and analyzed in Section 2. The section provides a rationale for the project supported by a review of literature and steps for implementation. The section continues with a timetable for implementation of the project, a plan for evaluating the project, and a discussion of the implications for social change that the project is intended to bring about. Documents related to the proposed project will be included in the appendices.

Description and Goals

This proposed professional development opportunity will educate teachers on what constitutes PLCs and what is expected of them in PLCs. In this study, I interviewed seven elementary teachers from the same school to determine their perceptions of their PLCs. Findings suggested a need for teachers to have a better understanding of what actually constitutes PLCs and what is expected of them in PLCs. Although there is collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning in the current PLCs in place at the school under study, there is not enough time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning to have effective PLCs. Leadership from the building and central office level should address the issue of time so that teachers can more effectively collaborate, learn, and be involved in their own PLCs. The proposed professional development offers teachers a PLC model characterized by DuFour and Eaker (2008), which is different from

that which is already provided within the school under study. The proposed project seeks to address how teachers may implement effective PLCs. Effective professional development needs to involve active learning for teachers and be collaborative (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Hunzicker, 2010). Although PLCs at the school under study meet these requirements, as teachers work collaboratively as a team to improve student learning, teachers are often confused about what actually constitutes PLCs. The administrator has left much of the decision-making to the grade-level chairpersons; therefore, grade-level teams of teachers must learn about PLCs. They must also learn the basics of PLC implementation. Although the idea of more time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning were identified in the interviews, the professional development opportunity is designed to address the issues of collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning. The professional development opportunity is intended to supplement the current PLCs in place at the school. This would be an opportunity for teachers to learn more what about constitutes PLCs and what is expected of them in PLCs.

The project will take place on three professional development workdays at the beginning of the upcoming school year. The project will take place in the media center at the school under study. The first day will be a session for PLC grade-level chairpersons. The first session will consist of a guest speaker, the administrators, and the grade-level chairpersons. In this session, the guest speaker (professional learning consultant) will discuss what constitutes effective PLCs and how grade-level chairpersons and grade-level teams of teachers should function in a PLC. The administrator will discuss the data on the

effectiveness of the current PLC under study. The second and third days will be sessions for all teachers. The sessions will be conducted by the grade-level chairpersons. In both sessions, grade-level chairs will discuss DuFour's (2004) model of PLCs and present a series of short skits that demonstrate components of effective PLCs. The grade-level chairpersons will provide information to grade-level teams of teachers on how to plan and conduct PLCs. Furthermore, the third session will consist of follow-up discussions about the second session.

In addition to the sessions, a written request will be made to the building and central office level administration to discuss PLC issues, time issues, and possible solutions. The request will seek additional time for PLC meetings at the school under study. The request will be a written document and include some of the findings of this study.

The goal of the project is to address the issues of collaboration, time, involvement, and teacher learning at the school under study. The literature review in Section 1 identified the benefits of PLCs as well as ways for addressing the problem. The project could assist teachers in learning about PLCs and knowing what is expected of them in PLCs. The project could also assist teachers in understanding effective PLC models. When teachers have a greater understanding of how to function in PLCs, they are less likely to experience the issues of time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning. After completing the proposed project, the participants should be able to function in PLCs, and the goals will be met.

Project Rationale

The project was chosen because the review of literature in Section 1 showed that there was a need for teachers to know what constitutes PLCs and what is expected of them in PLCs. The project genre was also chosen because the data analysis in Section 2 indicated that teachers needed to more effectively learn together in the current PLCs at the school under study.

The data analyzed in Section 2 indicated that there was a need for teachers to know how to function in PLCs at the school under study. The data analysis showed that there is not enough time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning in the current PLCs under study. Teachers need to be educated on how to function in PLCs. This project therefore fits in with the data collected as it aims to improve the current PLCs through teacher education.

This project genre was chosen for two reasons. First, it involves a training session by an expert in PLCs using current data to inform grade-level chairpersons on how to teach grade-level teams of teachers on how to function in PLCs. This presentation is supplemented by an administrator at the school under study who is able to put the PLC data into perspective by relating them to the actual school. Second, the project was chosen because it involves professional development sessions relating to how teachers learn. By allowing grade-level chairpersons to present to grade-level teams of teachers, the grade-level teams of teachers are more likely to relate to it and learn from it.

The project addresses the problem in several ways. The problem identified was a lack of teacher education about PLCs in the school under study. Data collected indicated

that the current PLCs could not be effective without teachers understanding how to function in PLCs. Utilizing an expert speaker with a research background in PLCs would be an effective way to disseminate the information to grade-level chairpersons who need to know how to plan and implement PLCs. The problem is further addressed through teachers educating other teachers. When teachers see their colleagues discussing issues that they can relate to, it makes the information more relevant to them. The goal is that the experience of teachers working with colleagues and taking part in the follow-up discussion will improve the current PLCs in the school under study. The content of the project addresses the issues of time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning in PLCs. This project may be a solution to the problem.

Review of the Literature

Collaboration, lack of time, involvement, and teacher learning are some of the potential barriers associated with the implementation of PLCs (Teague & Anfara, 2012). In this project study, I have determined that collaboration, time, involvement, and teacher learning are problems associated with planning and implementing PLCs in the school under study. To address these problems, the project will consist of a 1-day training session for grade-level chairpersons, 2 days of professional development for grade-level teams of teachers, and a written request to the central office level administration requesting additional time for PLCs.

In order to develop my project, I conducted a review of literature related to my project genre (professional development) and the content of my project (time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning). The literature review for the proposed

1-day training session for grade-level chairpersons and 2-day professional development sessions for grade-level teams of teachers focuses on how to best implement professional development that positively affects students and allows teachers to retain the pertinent skills learned. The literature review emphasizes how adults learn. It also focuses on identifying four core elements (time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning) of effective PLCs in order for the professional development to be effective. As part of this literature review, peer-reviewed articles were chosen and the following databases were used: ERIC, Education Research Complete, Thoreau, SAGE publications, EBSCOHost, and ProQuest Central. The following search terms were used: *PLCs, teacher learning, collaboration, professional development, teacher professional learning communities, effective professional development,* and *adult learning.* A combination of the Boolean phrases and databases provided me with the information that enabled me to reach saturation for the literature review.

Effective Professional Development

Professional development opportunities for teachers are offered in a variety of formats (Koellner & Jacobs, 2015). However, effective professional development needs to involve active learning for teachers, be sustained and ongoing, integrated with school-improvement plans, collaborative, and job-embedded (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Desimone, 2011; Hunzicker, 2011). The purpose of education is student learning. Student learning occurs when teachers are provided with professional development. The purpose of professional development is to increase the quality of the teacher (Gulamhussein, 2013; Koellner & Jacobs, 2015). Professional development is required

for teachers to continually focus and develop their learning and skills as well as improve teaching quality in a world highlighted by rapid change (Teague & Anfara, 2012). Much of the professional development offered is based on the needs of students and teachers (Koellner & Jacobs, 2015).

Gulamhussein (2013) found that some professional development being implemented is ineffective at changing teachers' practice and student learning. Gulamhussein (2013) stated that schools should develop new approaches to teacher learning, approaches that create real changes in teacher practice and improve student learning. Roseler and Dentzau (2013) found that professional development opportunities that are mandated in a "top-down fashion" are not in the best interest of student learning or the development of teacher practices (p. 621). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) found that traditional professional development with emphasis on training teachers in new strategies had little or no effect on student learning. Koellner and Jacobs (2015) acknowledged the need for teachers to take active roles in their professional learning and development. They found that professional development should not only focus on teacher learning, but teachers participating actively and collaboratively in professional development. Therefore, I have created a learning opportunity for grade-level chairpersons and grade-level teams of teachers to grow and develop in their practice so that they, in turn, can help their students learn.

Professional development for teachers improves teaching and, in turn, improves student learning (Petrie & McGee, 2012). According to Kasempour (2009), effective professional development occurs over an extended period, involves active participation of

teachers immersing themselves in the learning activities and discussions, models the pedagogy, and provides teachers with opportunities for continuous reflection on their beliefs and practices during the learning activities and in their classrooms (p. 66).

In the project, grade-level chairpersons will be trained in the development of effective professional development based on how adults learn. Before the grade-level chairpersons can develop effective professional development, they need to know how adults learn so that they can apply some of those principles. A greater understanding of how adults learn would help the grade-level chairpersons structure professional development activities to meet the needs of the learner (Merriam, 2008). Literature reveals that professional development needs to be more responsive to teachers' own learning (Petrie & McGee, 2012).

Drawing on the adult learning theory of Knowles (1984), adults want to understand why it is necessary to learn something and require their learning to be meaningful. Knowles (1984) outlined an adult learning theory, which Knowles called andragogy. Within this theory, Knowles (1984) presented key characteristics of adult learners and several principles for teaching adults. In this professional development opportunity, grade-level chairpersons will need to know how to teach grade-level teams of teachers. A major principle of adult learning is that adults should be involved in planning and organizing their own instruction (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Therefore, to develop effective professional development, the grade-level chairpersons would need to address the educational needs of adult learners.

Two main theories guide teaching adults. The theories include constructivist learning theory and adult learning theory, or andragogy. McLeskey (2011) found that professional development should not be taught in isolation; rather, presenters should work with participants in making connections between the new information being presented and their prior knowledge and experience. McLeskey (2011) also found that teachers felt a sense of accomplishment when they were allowed to choose how they wanted to learn. They valued guiding their own learning. This principle is consistent with theories of teaching and learning for adults (Knowles, 1984). Knowles (1984) has written on the topic of adult learning and offered principles that can be applied in practice. Adult learners approach learning with clear goals in mind, using their life experiences to make sense of new information. They are motivated by opportunities to address problems and create solutions that relate directly to their everyday lives. They prefer open-ended learning activities and function best when they have a voice in their learning.

Hanna, Salzman, Reynolds, and Fergus (2010) conducted a study in which they challenged the perception among adult educators that adult learners do not like active, engaged group work. They created a site-visit model that put their teachers and administrators into a learner role along with their adult students. The site-visit model resulted in more effective on-site professional development because teachers and administrators moved from being observers to being participants.

In this professional development opportunity, there is a need for teachers to learn about PLCs and learn the basics of PLC implementation. Hunzicker (2010) asserted that teachers believe professional development is relevant when it directly addresses their

needs and concerns. In this project study, evidence demonstrated that elementary teachers do not have the depth of understanding about PLCs and much of the decision-making is left up to them. They are confused about what actually constitutes PLCs and what is expected of them. Effective professional development is supportive because it considers the needs, concerns, and interests of teachers along with those of the school (Hunzicker, 2010).

Research on effective professional development has provided a wide range of results (Guskey, 2009). There are many variables when considering the effectiveness of professional development and its implementation. However, when analyzing the literature studies, the main components of shared leadership, shared vision, time, and collaboration could be identified (Teague & Anfara, 2012). The literature consistently shows that effective professional development must meet the demands and needs of each school and always aim to improve student learning. Teachers must work together through shared leadership to move towards a shared vision. Using time and communicating effectively can help create a collaborative educational environment. Effective professional development engages teachers in learning activities that are supportive, job-embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative, and on-going (Hunzicker, 2010). With these characteristics in place, teachers are more likely to consider professional development relevant and authentic, which makes teacher learning and improved teaching practices more likely.

Conducting an Effective 3-Day Professional Development Opportunity

Effective professional development should be designed to meet the needs of learners. Effective professional development must first be focused on teacher needs, followed by determining the means with which to accomplish them (Desimone, 2009). Therefore, conducting an effective 3-day professional development opportunity is designed to provide elementary teachers with new skills and strategies that are used in classroom practice (McLeskey, 2011). Professional development activities should be thoughtfully planned and well-implemented in order to enhance teachers' knowledge and skills (Bakkenes, Vermunt, & Wubbels, 2010; Guskey, 2009).

Desimone (2009) studied the effects of professional development and found that professional development increased teacher knowledge, changed teacher instruction, and improved student learning. Desimone (2009) proposed a core conceptual framework with five key features of professional learning that can lead to depth of teaching practice: content focus, active learning, coherence, duration, and collective participation. I will incorporate these features into the project so that continuous improvement can take place. First, I will focus on how teachers learn so that the learning is linked to teaching practice. Next, I will require teachers to learn together and from each other. I will ensure that the activities planned occur over a length of time that will allow teachers to learn, and the activities are collaborative with those who teach on the same grade level.

Research indicates that professional development should tailor to the teachers' needs and experiences (Bakkenes et al., 2010; White, 2014). Participants do not have the same level of expertise and experience. By assessing participant prior knowledge, the

workshop planner and presenter can provide information that is of great value to all participants (Burkman, 2012). When this occurs, opportunities exist to change teachers, change instructional practice, and eventually, improve student learning (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013).

Guskey (2009) found that professional development is considered effective when student learning improves. Guskey and Yoon (2009) reviewed research studies that showed a positive relationship between professional development and improvements in student learning. According to Guskey and Yoon (2009), professional development focused on "the implementation of research-based instructional practices, involved active-learning experiences for participants, and provided teachers with opportunities to adapt the practices to their unique classroom situations" (p. 496).

Additionally, it is important for a planner to consider the characteristics of effective professional development that have been shown in numerous research studies to produce positive outcomes for improving teaching and learning (Blank, 2010; Desimone 2011). Furthermore, professional development must be "adapted to the unique contextual characteristics of a particular school" (Guskey, 2009, p. 224). In a descriptive study, Lustick (2011) surveyed candidates for National Board Certification from 42 states about their professional learning experiences. Results from this survey indicated that educators should create professional development to acknowledge individual needs, content learning, and specific goal-oriented outcomes.

Effective professional development is designed with the end goal in mind with the focus on student learning (Hunzicker, 2010). In the project, grade-level chairpersons will

be trained in planning and implementing effective professional development based on Dufour's (2004) model. Becoming familiar with this model will enable grade-level chairpersons to facilitate the development of effective professional development for grade-level teams of teachers in the school under study. Teachers need to experience on-going sessions of collaboration and learning (Petrie & McGee, 2012). Four themes of effective professional development identified in the literature and the study's findings are time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning. The themes of time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning as addressed by the participants in this study, as a necessary part of any professional development seemed to be consistent in the literature. Therefore, I will plan a training session for grade-level chairpersons so that they may assist grade-level teams of teachers in planning and implementing effective PLCs to include more collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning. I will also plan professional development sessions for grade-level teams of teachers so that they may learn more about PLCs and how they should function in PLCs.

Time

In addition to the training and professional development sessions, a written request will be made to the central office level administration requesting additional time for teachers to meet in PLC groups. Lack of sufficient time for teachers to meet in PLCs was a problem cited in the literature. The literature stated in some way that professional development can only be effective if it is ongoing (Guskey, 2009; Hunzicker, 2010). Teachers need to be allowed the time to learn, collaborate, and share ideas with colleagues. However, time was a significant problem for teachers who wish to work

together with colleagues (Leclerc, Moreau, Dumouchel, & Sallafranque-St. Louis, 2012), and using professional development effectively will only produce effective results (Guskey, 2009).

In line with this view, Thornburgh and Mungai (2011) found that teachers reported a need for time to meet and discuss practices and learn from each other. Teachers believed that no reform would be successful without the time needed for teachers to participate in PLCs. Thornton (2010) also found time to be an issue as it related to teachers participating in PLCs. Thornton (2010) described the need for additional time for teachers to participate in PLCs as critical for effective PLCs.

Attendance at all PLCs at the school under study was not consistent, with some teachers citing time as a problem and reason for not attending. Some teachers saw PLCs as an imposition and not a priority. As indicated by Sanchez (2012), time must be addressed so that effective PLCs may exist. Time should be dedicated to allow teachers to work collaboratively and engage in meaningful learning (Sanchez, 2012). Teachers need to have the time to engage in professional development to improve their teaching practice (Hunzicker, 2010).

Collaboration

Like the theme of time, the theme of collaboration was very popular amongst the literature. The literature stated that professional development can only be effective if it involves collaboration (Attard, 2012; Desimone, 2011; Levine & Marcus, 2010; Williams, 2013). Collaboration has been used in different ways pointing to different kinds of interaction among teachers (Forte & Flores, 2014). While collaborating, teachers

can exchange ideas or experiences, develop and discuss new materials, get feedback from colleagues, and give each other moral support. Collaboration has been seen as a solution to problems in education in regards to the quality of teaching and learning (Levine & Marcus, 2010). Desimone (2011) stated that groups of teachers from the same grade, subject, or school should participate in professional development activities together to build an interactive learning community (p. 69). Professional development done collaboratively is active and interactive for the learners (Hunzicker, 2010).

Studies have shown that effective professional development involves collaboration among teachers. Evidence of its importance was found in the participants' responses to the interview questions in Section 2. Based on the data from the interviews, collaboration was not working among teachers. Mindich and Lieberman (2012) found that PLCs that have demonstrated success consist of teachers from the same school who have autonomy to select their learning objectives and have gone through training on how to collaborate.

Williams (2013) conducted a qualitative study in which leaders of an urban school district organized more than 200 schools into smaller PLCs so that teams of reading teachers could collaborate for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem-solving. The purpose of the study was to determine if students' reading achievement increased as a result of weekly collaboration among teachers in an urban school district in Texas. The data showed that teachers perceived PLCs as impacting their classroom practices and students' achievement. Williams (2013) acknowledged that the

results from this study provide strong support that collaboration through PLCs is important for organizational improvements.

In another study, Attard (2012) examined collaboration among teachers. Attard found that teacher collaboration supported planning a course of action and as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills while building competence and self-confidence. This study supports that teacher practices are improved through collaboration, and teacher learning is affected by teacher collaboration. Collaboration and teacher learning should exist in professional development; however, these components alone do not indicate whether professional development is effective (Deimone, 2011).

Involvement

Like the theme of time and collaboration, the theme of involvement was found to be important in the literature. The literature stated that professional development can only be effective if teachers are involved (Bayar, 2014; Katz & Earl, 2010; National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2011). Professional development should have a meaningful impact on teacher practice and student learning (Hunzicker, 2010). Teachers' willingness to actively participate in discussions about student learning and teaching practices impacts PLCs (Katz & Earl, 2010). Therefore, teachers should be provided with opportunities for active participation in PLCs to improve their teaching practices and student learning.

Katz and Earl (2010) found that when teachers are involved in PLCs, significant positive changes in school practices occur, which leads to improved student achievement. They argued that mere membership of PLCs is not enough to improve school or student

performance; only through teachers' "intensive involvement" in PLCs will improve teaching practices and student performance (Katz & Earl, 2010, p. 42).

Likewise, Bayer (2014) pointed out the importance of providing opportunities for active participation. Bayer (2014) found that an effective professional development activity should be designed that allows the participants (teachers) to engage in active participation during the activities because they want to learn by doing. The National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality (2011) found that teachers' active involvement in PLCs lies in teachers' sincere commitment and willingness to participate and learn in PLCs. Effective PLCs require teachers to engage in learning opportunities so that they can improve teaching practices.

Teacher Learning

Like the theme of time, collaboration, and involvement, the theme of teacher learning was highly valued in the literature. The literature stated that professional development can only be effective if it involves teacher learning (Bakkenes et al., 2010; Caskey & Carpenter, 2012; Petrie & McGee, 2012). Teacher learning is an important topic in educational research. In professional development, teachers have the challenge of understanding their dual role, that of teachers as learners and as teachers of students (Petrie & McGee, 2012). Therefore, I need to develop and implement professional development that takes into account the needs of teachers and students. Educational reforms require both changes in teachers' ways of thinking about student learning and changes in their teaching practices. Learning occurs most effectively when the participants are equal partners in the learning (Roseler & Dentzau, 2013). In the

interviews, participants agreed that building knowledge was collaborative by learning from colleagues. Teachers expressed appreciation for opportunities to learn with their colleagues.

Bakkenes et al., (2010) conducted a study aimed at increasing understanding of how teachers learn. The learning experiences were analyzed in terms of learning activities and learning outcomes. Results indicated that the type of learning environment was significantly associated with the learning activities and learning outcomes. According to Petrie and McGee (2012), "In professional development, teachers are encouraged to be active learners who pursue continued growth in their knowledge, understandings and skills to support the development of themselves as ongoing learners" (p. 60).

Caskey and Carpenter (2012) found that common planning time, professional learning communities, and critical friends groups are organizational models designed to facilitate teacher learning that ultimately benefits students. Caskey and Carpenter (2012) further stated that teachers not only need instruction about organizational models to advance teacher learning, they also need opportunities to discuss the importance of continual professional growth and engage with their peers in collaborative learning.

Easton (2012) found that learning is better if teachers in PLCs are given a chance to figure out how to organize themselves specifically and what to do in these PLCs related to a school's goals. Easton (2012) asserted that teachers should have a strong voice in what is happening to them and what they are doing (p. 52). When teachers are

trained on information that is relevant to them, they will more likely implement the training into their classrooms (Hunzicker, 2010).

Implementation, Potential Resources, and Existing Supports

If professional development is to be effective, it must focus on time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning. Implementation of this project would be part of preplanning for the upcoming school year. In addition, the teachers that participated in the project study would be included in the 3-day professional development opportunity. Additional supports already in place include grade level meetings for continued collaboration and teacher learning support, and the district calendar has built-in professional development days. As elementary teachers are returning from summer vacation and starting the new school year, they are meeting with grade-level chairpersons for each grade level. This professional development opportunity can help teachers learn to communicate effectively with colleagues and learn the necessary knowledge and skills to function as collaborative PLCs. It is my responsibility to implement the 3-day professional development opportunity which will involve the following steps: (a) get permission from my administrator, (b) plan for the 1-day training session for the grade-level chairpersons, (c) plan for the 2-day professional development for grade-level teams of teachers, (d) ensure that the sessions include components of effective PLCs, and (e) evaluate results of the professional development opportunity.

First, it is important to have the support of the administrator. This professional development opportunity must take place within a positive environment. When teachers are supported by an administrator, they see the value in learning. The administrator will

supply the location, resources, equipment, and funding. Equipment will consist of a laptop, projector, and a Promethean Board for the PowerPoint presentation. I will ensure that the content meets the needs of the participants. The proposed professional development content was determined by the data from the interviews with the elementary teachers. The project consists of a 1-day training session for grade-level chairpersons and a 2-day professional development session. The project is composed of several activities for which I will find a guest speaker for the training session for grade-level chairpersons, advertise the professional development sessions for grade-level teams of teachers, prepare a PowerPoint presentation, prepare handouts, create name tags for participants, prepare a sign-in sheet for participants, arrange for refreshments, and develop a professional development evaluation for all participants.

The third step will be to conduct the professional development opportunity incorporating the six characteristics of an effective PLC: (a) shared mission, vision, values, and goals focused on student learning, (b) collaborative culture with a focus on learning, (c) collective inquiry into best practice and current reality, (d) action orientation: learning by doing, (e) commitment to continuous improvement, and (f) results orientation (DuFour et al., 2004). The fourth step will be that of evaluation. Both formal and informal methods of evaluation can be employed in determining the impact of the 1-day training session for grade-level chairpersons and 2-day professional development sessions for grade-level teams of teachers. I will use a formal method to assess changes before and after the 1-day training and 2-day professional development sessions.

Potential barriers might include teacher disapproval to this project. Teachers may not buy into the professional development opportunity. In addition to teacher disapproval, the school may not be able to fund all the teachers to attend the professional development opportunity. The timetable may also be a potential barrier. The school may not be able to have time to accommodate a 1-day training session for grade-level chairpersons and a 2-day professional development session for grade-level teams of teachers. A final potential barrier may be that the central office level administration may not be able to provide additional time for PLCs.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The implementation of this project would occur during the 2015-2016 school year. In order to get my presentation on the agenda, permission for conducting the professional development opportunity would need to be granted prior to the end of this school year. I will then request a meeting with the administrator to present the project, and upon approval, I will schedule the professional development opportunity in May 2015. This project would also need to be approved by the central office level administration and then added to the list of their meetings already set. I will contact elementary teachers via e-mail and inform them of the 3-day professional development opportunity. Then I will conduct the 3-day professional development opportunity in August 2015.

Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others

I will be the primary person responsible for the implementation of the project. The administrator will provide support in the ways of providing a location for the professional

development opportunity. I will also use the administrator to gain a list of the grade-level chairpersons for the upcoming school year and the grade-level teams of teachers and their contact information. I will contact a guest speaker who is familiar with facilitating effective professional development to assist me in training the grade-level chairpersons. The grade-level chairpersons will then assist me with the 2-day professional development sessions to teach grade-level teams of teachers about PLCs. The grade-level chairpersons will instruct teachers on planning and implementing effective PLCs and on how the teachers should function in PLCs.

Project Evaluation

The goal of this project is to provide a professional development opportunity that will educate teachers on what constitutes PLCs and how to function in PLCs. Elementary teachers can gain skills and knowledge to help them function in PLCs. Feedback (surveys) will be gathered on the day of the professional development. Additional feedback will be gathered several months after grade level groups have participated in PLCs in the school under study. The follow-up survey will ask teacher participants to evaluate the quality of the materials and information provided after they have had time to plan and implement PLCs. I will receive the feedback and use it to prepare for future professional development. To improve the professional development opportunity, I will adjust the content and/or activities offered in the 1-day training session and 2-day professional development based upon participants' feedback. This information will also be reported to the school under study and central office level administration at a scheduled meeting following the professional development.

The professional development will include a goal based evaluation that will provide the ability to determine if the goals of the professional development opportunity have been met. Teachers will be asked to complete a survey on the effectiveness of the workshop. This would be an indication that the workshop was achieving its goals. I will look at the evaluations to determine if changes to the professional development need to be made. The surveys would also provide data so that I could secure grant monies that would support future professional development.

Implications Including Social Change

The literature reviewed and input from teachers indicated that professional development that addresses the issues of time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning in PLCs was the best project to pursue. While the focus of this project was on an elementary school, research shows that professional development for teachers is important. The outcomes of this study can also reach beyond this school. This professional development opportunity can serve as a model for other schools in the district, as well as in other parts of the world. In addition, the grade-level chairpersons in this school may be able to share learned practices and skills with other teachers. Achieving social change at a larger level is possible if other school districts educate their teachers on what constitutes PLCs and what their expectations are as participants in PLCs.

Conclusion

The proposed project was chosen based on the perceptions of elementary teachers in regards to their own PLCs. A professional development opportunity was developed to

be used as a vehicle for change. In this section I described the rationale for choosing this method as the best tool for educating teachers. The literature review was undertaken to better understand how theory was used to design, plan, and implement this project. I also discussed the implementation of the project and the means that will be used to determine if the professional development opportunity meets the goal of educating elementary teachers about how to function in PLCs.

The professional development opportunity was developed because there was a need to educate elementary teachers on how to function in PLCs. In addition to the benefits the teachers would reap, there may also be a change and improvement in student learning. Using the perceptions of teachers who are participating in PLCs, I have been able to design a professional development opportunity to share with the school under study.

The proposed project for this study is a 1-day training session for grade-level chairpersons and a 2-day professional development session for grade-level teams of teachers. The findings indicated that there was not enough time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning in the current PLCs under study. Teachers need more time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning to have effective PLCs (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012).

In Section 4, my reflections and conclusions culminate the project's strengths and weaknesses. In addition, this section discusses what was learned about scholarship, project development, leadership, and change. An analysis of what was learned about myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer is included. Finally, this section

concludes with the project's potential impact on social change and reflects on the implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In Section 4, I have included my reflections on the project study, the format chosen for professional development for elementary teachers, and the process of conducting an effective 3-day professional development opportunity. I begin with the strengths and limitations of the 3-day professional development opportunity for elementary teachers. Then I address recommendations for addressing the professional development opportunity in a different way. Other areas discussed include an analysis of what I have learned about myself during this process, an overall reflection on the importance of the project, and a discussion of the potential impact that this project could have on social change and future research.

After the data were collected, coded, and analyzed, the findings revealed that some teachers do not know how to function in PLCs. Using the findings and current literature, a professional development opportunity was proposed for elementary teachers. Findings indicated that the teachers acknowledged a need for more time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning in their PLCs. The teachers interviewed felt the need for professional development with attention to how to function in their PLCs. To increase the school and school district's awareness of the issues of time, collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning in PLCs, a 1-day training session for grade-level chairpersons and a 2-day professional development session were designed. The professional development sessions will provide teachers with information regarding how to function in PLCs.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this project study is that the elementary teachers interviewed made it known that professional development was needed to educate them on how to function in PLCs. Effective PLCs can be a valuable form of professional development that can lead to enhanced professional growth and increased student achievement (DuFour et al., 2008; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). Considering adults learn in a variety of ways, I specifically applied Bandura's (1977), Vygotsky's (1978), and Wenger's (2000) learning theories to explain how adults develop and learn. I also based this study on Hord's (1997), DuFour et al.'s (2008) and DuFour's (2011) concepts of PLCs. The literature discussed in Section 1 of this study showed that current professional development practices are ineffective at enhancing professional growth (Caskey & Carpenter, 2012; Hahn & Lester, 2012; Hellner, 2008; Rismark & Solvberg, 2011). However, there are many positive attributes that the professional development opportunity offers that are not readily available through the current PLCs. The current PLCs cannot provide teachers with the type of collaboration and involvement that is needed to assist with planning and implementing effective PLCs.

Another strength of this project is its potential to increase collaboration. It is important to acknowledge that professional development can only be effective if it involves collaboration (Attard, 2012; Desimone, 2011; Levine & Marcus, 2010; Williams, 2013). The teachers will be able to collaborate with one another. They will have a better understanding of the importance of collaboration among colleagues. PLCs are an effective model of professional development (Barton & Stepanek, 2012; Blanton

& Perez, 2011; DuFour et al., 2008; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). Although this was confirmed in the literature, the following themes emerged from the data: collaboration, teacher involvement, teacher learning, and time. PLCs that have demonstrated success consist of teachers from the same school who have gone through training on how to collaborate (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). In addition, the professional development opportunity provides teachers with an opportunity to increase their understanding and knowledge about PLCs and how to function in PLCs. The elementary teachers will learn more about how to collaborate, be involved, and learn in PLCs. For example, they will be able to share ideas with other teachers, fully participate, and engage in meaningful learning and teaching. Teacher practices are improved through collaboration, and teacher learning is affected by teacher collaboration (Attard, 2012). This project will give the elementary teachers in this study the voice they need to positively affect student learning and their own learning.

There are a few limitations that have been highlighted in literature. First, one limitation of this project study was the fact that the sample size was small. I do not feel that this skewed the data, but more elementary teachers interviewed across the district could have further strengthened the study. According to Creswell (2009) and Glesne (2011), obtaining a sample size that is appropriate is very important. Although a large sample size is more representative of the population (Glesne, 2011), I used purposeful sampling. The study's participants were selected using the purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling required me to have a target number of participants who helped make sense of the problem or research question (Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011;

Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). Another limitation will be the need to finance the 3-day professional development sessions. The school budget is tight and a professional development opportunity may not seem possible to the school administrator. Third, a limitation of this project study to be addressed is getting the central level office administration to buy into the idea of providing more time for PLCs. Time was a problem for teachers who wish to learn, collaborate, and share ideas with colleagues (Leclerc et al., 2012). Lack of time for teachers to meet in PLCs was a problem often cited in the literature (Guskey, 2009; Hunzicker, 2010; Sanchez, 2012). Teachers expressed a need for additional time to participate in PLCs in order to learn, collaborate, and share ideas with other teachers (Leclerc et al., 2012; Thornburgh & Mungai, 2011; Thornton, 2010).

My recommendations for the remediation of the limitations are to use the professional development opportunity during teacher workdays, which would allow all teachers to participate. If teacher workdays are not an option, the professional development training sessions can be substituted for grade level meetings. This project is by no means a panacea. A 3-day professional development session cannot possibly solve any school's issues. The professional development opportunity is intended to change the approach that teachers take and the mindset with which they approach their PLCs.

Recommendations for Addressing the Project in a Different Way

Information from participants interviewed helped to guide me in the creation of a 1-day training session for grade level chairpersons and a 2-day professional development for grade level teams of teachers. The professional development opportunity will educate grade level chairpersons on how to work and communicate with teams of teachers. The

professional development opportunity will also educate teams of teachers on how to function in PLCs. However, the project could have been addressed in other ways. One recommendation for addressing the project differently would be to create a resource book with information from the literature and professional development sessions. This resource book could be used on a regular basis and referenced as needed. However, this recommendation would not have wide-ranging results unless the teachers made strong efforts to share their learning with colleagues.

Another recommendation for addressing the project would be to create a website for teachers. The website would include activities related to collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning. The website may also include models of effective PLCs. Providing support in this capacity might also alleviate teacher resistance to participate and function collaboratively in current PLCs. Once again, the problem with such recommendation would not have widespread results unless the teachers made strong efforts to share their learning with their colleagues.

Scholarship

As I look back, I realize I have acquired many new skills and a greater knowledge of my topic. As a result of this project study, I have gained knowledge from my reading of the literature. My reading of the literature highlighted the importance of PLCs. Through collaboration and interaction with colleagues, I grew as an educator and student. I have gained a deep respect for the online learning culture and came to realize the benefit of the discussion posts. The activities and assignments required reflective thinking and enhanced my learning experience. I was often challenged to think critically about my role

as an educator. My time management skills were enhanced as I sought to complete my course assignments in a timely manner. Each day my uncertainties regarding my scholarly writing skills diminished, and I became more confident that I would be able to successfully complete this project study.

Furthermore, scholarship was learned through coursework and feedback from my professors and peers. My experience from the coursework taught me how to think critically and how to write scholarly. My experience from the feedback received from my professors and peers taught me how to appreciate different perspectives. Through my doctoral journey of developing this project study, I also learned how to put things into perspective. I discovered how to collect and analyze data. During data analysis, I discovered how to recognize common themes, how to code them, and how to interpret my findings.

Project Development and Evaluation

As I planned for and designed my professional development opportunity, I realize that the project required plenty of hard work and dedication to stay focused and on task. With this understanding, I was more sensitive to the teachers' needs and was able to tailor the professional development opportunity according to what was most effective for them. This could definitely maximize their learning experience. By planning this professional development opportunity, I was able not only to describe the methods but also to provide frameworks for critically examining the three training sessions to determine how well I met the needs of the teachers.

I have seen the need to address the question of how well I actually planned the sessions. A professional development opportunity must produce results, and I must be able to provide evidence of the results. It is my responsibility as the planner of this professional development opportunity to make sure that the time and resources that are spent on this professional development opportunity are used to make the greatest impact possible. To measure this impact, I will target the attitudes of the participants about the sessions, measure the knowledge gained by the participants, and measure the behavior changes by the participants.

Leadership and Change

Leadership is about change. In fact, leadership and change go hand in hand. Working on this project study required me to bring about change and to work together with others to achieve what I cannot accomplish alone. As a leader, I realize that I cannot do everything on my own without the help of others. Therefore, I have the challenge of empowering others and making sure that the change moves in the right direction. Being a leader is not easy. It takes a special type of person to inspire and motivate others to see beyond their current roles. I realize that being a leader requires a different mindset. A leader requires different skills and abilities beyond the norm. Before I developed this project, I spent a lot of time communicating with and listening to elementary teachers' perceptions of their PLCs. I recognized the need to use my skills and decision making efforts and those of others to respond to the teachers' perceptions of what needs to change. Little did I know that my purpose of being a leader would later impact my own perspective of what needs to change.

In this project study, I have taken the initiative to recognize change and have discovered appropriate ways to respond to change. I have learned that as a leader I must be sensitive and responsive to change. Change requires a lot of time, energy, and resourcefulness, along with leadership. To accomplish this, I began with a vision, and I shared this vision by designing a professional development opportunity for elementary teachers. This project required me to have a clear vision, an understanding of how to get where I want to go, and a sense of change that needs to happen in order for me to reach my goals. Not only that, through the collaboration with others, I was able to create common ground that serves to assist me to the realization of my vision. I have made a positive change with the contributions, talents, and efforts of others.

Analysis of Self as Scholar, Practitioner, and Project Developer

Because I am developing and implementing a project to educate elementary teachers, which contributes positively to school improvement efforts, I consider myself a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. As a scholar, I recognize the importance of being a lifelong learner. I have learned how to conduct research and analyze it. Being a scholar is something that I work hard for. I often build ideas and opinions about what I have read from the literature. I have learned the importance of using research-based strategies in research. I can use my knowledge and desire to learn while actively engaging in such a project.

The knowledge, the skills, and the relationships that I have developed through my participation in this doctoral program have made me a better teacher. My research on PLCs has allowed me to establish my own voice in an area for which I am passionate

about. I can speak and write with greater authority and confidence because of the understanding of conducting research. I have learned how to apply appropriate and meaningful theory to my work as a practitioner-scholar. The results of my research have helped me to develop new insights into the process of planning and implementing PLCs. Learning to design and execute a qualitative study has helped me gain an appreciation for its strengths, as well as its weaknesses.

In addition, my coursework at Walden University has broadened my perspective on a wide variety of issues. I have been able to use the knowledge and skills learned in my coursework to help my colleagues and students. I have been exposed to and participated in a lot of discussions that have enhanced my doctoral experience.

I have been teaching for 7 years and have always believed in the importance of thinking critically and creatively. I have had many opportunities to be a leader in my school. I actively participate as a school leader and manage numerous projects. I have organized several projects. However, this is the most important project that I have ever undertaken. As a project developer, I have created a professional development opportunity. This professional development opportunity is an indication of how I can take my knowledge and skills and put them to use for implementing social change. This project may be an important tool for all teachers.

Furthermore, I believe my doctoral journey has provided me with the knowledge and skills to develop a project that can promote positive social change. During the development of my project study, I had the pleasure of working alongside my chairperson. On several occasions, we were able to discuss the progress of my project.

Having someone else to understand the details of my project was very valuable. As I look back over the past few years, I realize that I am a consumer of research.

The Project's Potential Impact for Social Change

The inspiration to plan this project came to me through my interviewees. By interviewing seven elementary school teachers, I was constantly reminded of the necessity of planning and implementing effective PLCs. This project is a professional development opportunity that provides assistance to the teachers who do not understand their function in PLCs. There are professional development opportunities that enhance knowledge and skills, but none of these provide a means of understanding the importance of collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning in effective PLCs. Elementary teachers need to collaborate with others who can answer their questions about PLCs, share ideas about PLCs, and support them in planning and implementing effective PLCs. If successful, the professional development opportunity has the potential to educate teachers about effective PLCs. The project's potential impact for positive social change include every individual in the learning organization, parents, students, and members of the community working together to build an atmosphere of collaboration. The project may create opportunities to succeed, define roles and expectations, and improve professional practices which ultimately lead to student achievement.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

When I started this doctoral journey, I was not sure which direction it would take me. With each course assignment, the course of my doctoral studies became clearer. As I communicated and listened to others, the contribution that I wanted to make became very

clear. It was with the collaboration of seven elementary school teachers that the decision was made to design a professional development opportunity to assist them with planning and implementing effective PLCs.

The professional development opportunity has the potential of reaching all teachers. The applications that are meaningful for them can be achieved through the use of this 3-day professional development opportunity. This professional development opportunity can be used by researchers to gain the information they need from the teachers who are participating in the training sessions. The professional development opportunity can assist the teachers in planning and implementing effective PLCs in the school under study, schools in the district, and schools all over the world.

Conclusion

Looking back at the coursework that I have completed at Walden University, I can say that I am a leader of change. I have learned to conduct research in such a way that I can be an agent of change. I hope to continue to develop as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. However, the success of this professional development opportunity will depend on my knowledge and skills to implement it. This project can be the best solution to make positive social change as it relates to teachers knowing how to plan and implement effective PLCs. The project may represent a response to social change and an opportunity to benefit students, teachers, and schools. From this study, I can conclude that ABC Elementary School has the foundations of planning and implementing PLCs, but until collaboration, involvement, teacher learning, and time become more defined, effective PLCs at ABC Elementary School will not exist.

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Appendix A: Project

Professional Development 3-Day Training Session
Goals, Outcomes, and Objectives

Program Goals

A. Educate elementary teachers on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
B. Provide elementary teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills to understand the concept of PLCs and their function in PLCs.
C. Provie elementary teachers with the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues.
D. Provide support to elementary teachers as they plan and implement effective PLCs.

Program Outcomes

A. Elementary teachers will understand the benefits of effective PLC implementation.
B. Elementary teachers will learn to collaborate with colleagues to establish relationships and plan for student success.
C. Elementary teachers will spend time learning with others and develop instructional strategies to deliver content.
D. Elementary teachers will learn how to function in PLCs.

Program Objectives

A. As a result of the introduction the PLC concept, elementary teachers will be able to identify the benefits of PLCs and what makes an effective PLC.
B. As a result of DuFour's model of PLC, elementary teachers will be able to plan and implement effective PLCs.
C. As a result of the time spent with colleagues, elementary teachers will leave the training sessions with the necessary knowledge and skills for effective PLC implementation.
D. As a result of the professional development training sessions, elementary teachers will understand their function in PLCs.

Resources that can be used to assist in planning a PLC

- http://learningforward.org/standards/learning-communities#.VQ8uoOGPWPA
- http://www.tbaisd.k12.mi.us/departments/docs_gen/rsdd/MahammadMS2006.pdf
- http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues61.html
- http://www.centerforcsri.org/plc/

Target Audience

- Elementary School Teachers

Format

A variety of approaches that include:

- Question and Answer Sessions
- Brainstorming
- PowerPoint Presentations
- Role-playing Activity
- Demonstration Exercises
- Activating Strategies
- Cognitive Strategies
- Summarizing Strategies

Timetable

The 3-Day Professional Development Training Session should take place August 2015. The planning should begin by the end of the spring semester in order to establish more concrete information for the administration for the training sessions.

Materials and Equipment

- Name tags for participants
- Pencils, paper, or laptops
- Sticky notes
- Chart paper or poster board, markers, tape
- Articles about PLCs from the websites listed in the resources previously stated
- Handout
- Audio-visual equipment
- PowerPoint Presentation
- Evaluation Forms

Professional Development 3-Day Training Session
Agenda

Day 1 Agenda

8:30 – 9:00	Continental Breakfast
9:00 – 9:30	Facilitator will guide the group in the following activities: • Welcome (PowerPoint Slide 1) • Introductions – facilitator states, "Please introduce yourself by stating your name, the grade level you teach, and one expectation you have for this training session." • Icebreaker Activity (PowerPoint Slide 2) o The activity will build group rapport and provide an overview of the objectives for the training. • Establish expectations (norms) for professional development opportunity (PowerPoint Slide 3) • Facilitator will state the purpose of the training session: "The purpose of the training session is to strengthen collaboration among PLCs." • Facilitator will state the learning outcomes: "The learning outcomes will be grade-level chairpersons (leaders) that are better prepared to promote collaboration." • Facilitator will introduce guest speaker for today's training session. o Guest speaker will be a professional learning consultant with experience in conducting professional learning opportunities or trainings for educators. Facilitator requested that certain topics be discussed during guest speaker's presentation.
9:30 – 10:30	Guest Speaker will discuss expectations. • What makes a group successful? • What drives you crazy about meetings? • It is okay to… It is not okay to… Guest Speaker will discuss how to promote collaboration and involve grade-level chairpersons in an activity related to collaboration. • Breakout Session: Grade-level chairpersons will work together (collaborate) to identify needs for improvement and act upon those needs. Grade-level chairpersons will have input in the planning of the remaining sessions.
10:30 – 10:45	Break
10:45 – 11:45	Guest Speaker will discuss the following topics: • What is a PLC?

	• Key Characteristics that have been instrumental to school districts' success (Alignment, Support from all stakeholders, and Accountability) • Question and Answer Session Facilitator will provide instructions for breakout session. • Breakout Session: Grade-level chairpersons will work in groups to respond to the following: o What is the grade-level chairperson's role and the teacher's role in a professional learning community? o What makes up an effective professional learning community?
11:45 – 12:45	Lunch
12:45 – 1:45	Administrator will discuss school data with grade-level chairpersons by addressing the following: • What does the data say about the current professional learning community? • Re-establish expectations for the professional development opportunity Administrator will engage participants in activities to focus their attention on student performance in the classroom. • Grade-level chairpersons will be divided into groups to examine data on student progress, analyze student work, determine effective strategies to facilitate learning, design and critique powerful lessons, and develop classroom-based common assessments to measure progress. • Discuss and share.
1:45 – 2:00	Break
2:00 – 3:00	Facilitator will lead grade-level chairpersons in an activity. • Directions on the board will instruct participants to list "Effective PLCs Attributes" and "Ineffective PLCs Attributes." • Participants will write their responses on sticky notes and place them in the appropriate column. • Participants will discuss responses and share what they learned from this activity. Facilitator will discuss characteristics of adult learners (PowerPoint Slide 4) and later provide instructions for team activities. • Grade-level chairpersons will participate in team activities and group exercises to cover the main topics of adult learning theory: o Teachers (adult learners) need to know what is expected. o Teachers (adults) learn best when they are invested in the learning process.

	○ Teachers (adult learners) need to understand the relevance of what is being taught. • Breakout Session – grade-level chairpersons will put into practice the key concepts learned. By role-playing, team leaders will have the opportunity to practice putting the adult learning theory to work. They will engage in role-playing to learn techniques for communication and effectively managing their time. Administrators and grade-level chairs collaborate and discuss. • Grade-level chairpersons and administrators will work together to gain a better understanding of how to disseminate the information to grade-level teams of teachers (Handout 1). • A concluding activity will provide an opportunity for grade-level chairpersons to apply what they have learned in the training. • Question and Answer session Facilitator will explain the purpose of the feedback form, distribute the form, and allow time for teachers to complete the form (Grade-Level Chairperson Evaluation Form).

Day 2 Agenda

8:30 – 9:00	Continental Breakfast
9:00 – 9:30	Facilitator will guide the group in the following activities: • Welcome (PowerPoint Slide 5) • Introductions – facilitator states, "Please introduce yourself by stating your name, the grade level you teach, and one expectation you have for this training session." • Icebreaker Activity (PowerPoint Slide 6) • Facilitator will build group rapport and provide an overview of the objectives for the training. • Participants will be divided into small groups of four. Each team should be given an opportunity to set norms for the group. Each team will brainstorm, clarify, and come to a consensus on norm setting for the group. • Facilitator will establish expectations (norms) for the whole group (PowerPoint Slide 7).
9:30 – 10:30	Facilitator will guide participants in an activity. • Discuss the purpose of the professional development opportunity and say, "The purpose of this professional development opportunity is to strengthen collaboration, involvement, teacher learning, and time among PLCs."

	• Have groups define PLCs and write their definitions on chart paper or a poster and display it on the wall. Each group will share their definition. The entire group will then use each group's definition to construct one definition of PLCs. • Discuss the following. Each group will take a turn to share. o What do you think of your PLC? o Does your team model this definition? o What could you do better? o What steps would you take for your team to function as a optimal PLC? Grade-level chairpersons will then ask their assigned group: • "How could regular discussions like this help us function in PLCs?" Facilitator will guide participants in activity. • Discuss DuFour et. al.'s (2008) model of professional learning communities (PowerPoint Slide 8). • Instruct groups to discuss DuFour's model of PLCs and share ideas about what they could do better in their PLCs. • Give each group a different article about PLCs to read and discuss. On poster board or chart paper, groups will list what makes a learning community successful and what makes a learning community unsuccessful. • Participants will dialogue about the successes and challenges of planning and implementing PLCs.
10:30 – 10:45	Break
10:45 – 12:00	Facilitator will lead participants in an activity. • Directions on the board will instruct participants to list examples of "Positive Collaboration" and "Negative Collaboration." • Participants will write their responses on sticky notes and place them in the appropriate column. • Participants will discuss responses and share what they learned from this activity. Grade-level chairpersons will ask their assigned group: "Why is collaboration important in PLCs?" • Groups will role play situations that hinder collaboration. • Groups will discuss collaboration and brainstorm solutions for each situation.
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch
1:00 – 2:00	Grade-Level Chairpersons will discuss with their group: • How to plan and implement professional learning communities.

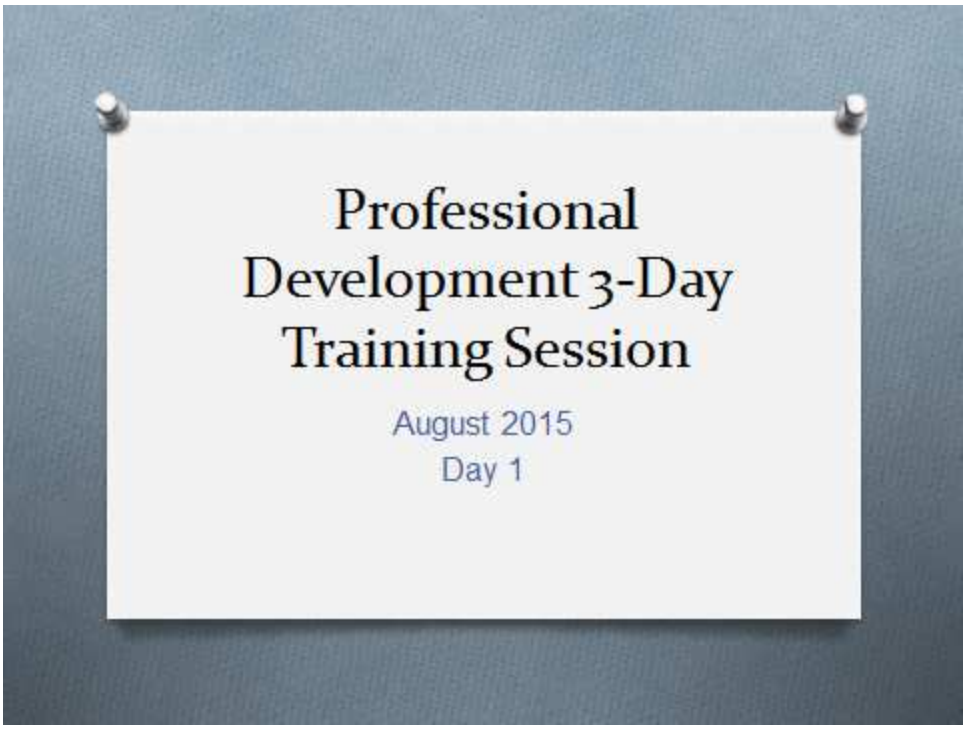
	Facilitator will guide participants in an activity. • Grade-level chairpersons and participants will be divided into different small groups. They will be asked to discuss what makes an effective PLC. They will work together in groups to come up with a list. One person from each group will write on poster or chart paper what the group came up with. Grade-level chairpersons and participants will discuss responses and point out similarities and differences among the groups.
2:00 – 2:15	Break
2:15 – 3:00	Facilitator will lead participants in an activity. • Share information about collaboration, involvement, and teacher learning from the study. • Breakout Session – Participants will put into practice the key concepts they just learned about. Grade-level chairpersons and teachers will be divided into small groups. They will be asked to play various roles: leader, teacher, administrator, and observer. They will be encouraged to give voice to the perspective of each involved and share what each might be feeling, thinking, and so forth. The "observer" will be asked to make note of how this dynamic might impact others such as colleagues, students, and parents. • 3-2-1 Summarizing Strategy – Teachers will share 3 new things they learned, 2 things they found to be interesting, and 1 question they still have.

Day 3 Agenda

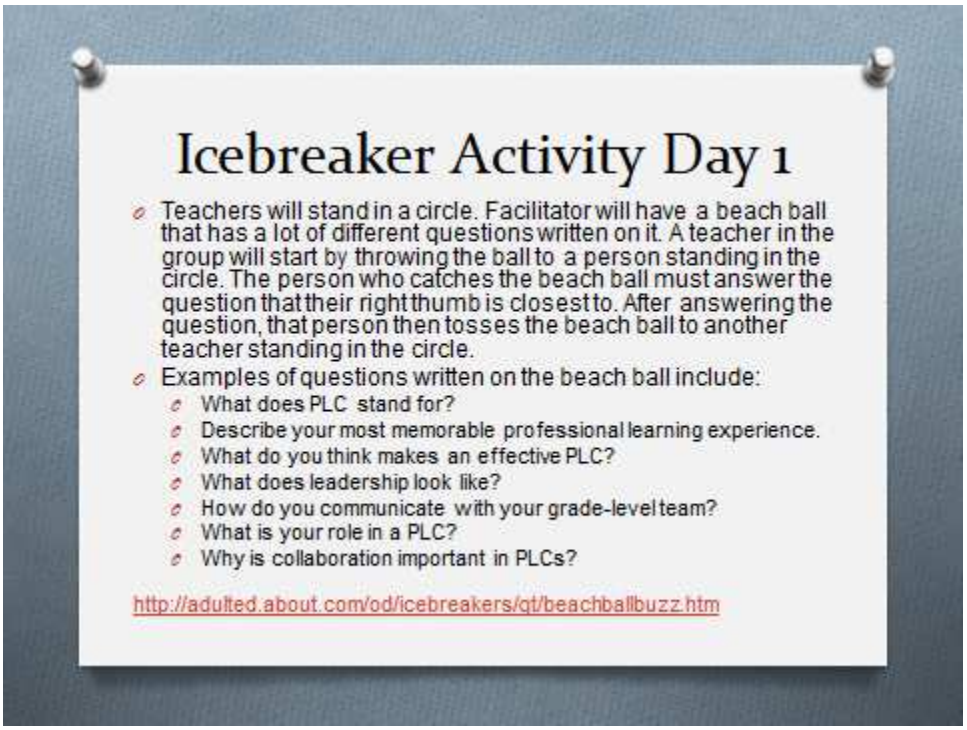
8:30 – 9:00	Continental Breakfast
9:00 – 9:30	Facilitator will guide the group in the following activities: • Welcome Back (PowerPoint Slide 9) • Revisit expectations (norms) for professional development opportunity (PowerPoint Slide 10) • Whole Group Discussion – Recap of Day 2
9:30 – 10:30	Facilitator will instruct participants to separate into small groups with their grade-level chairperson. • Grade-level chairpersons will review key components of DuFour et. al.'s (2008) professional learning community model (PowerPoint Slide 11) • Facilitator will ask each grade-level chairperson to select an index card from a bucket. Each index card will have a different component of an effective professional learning community written on it. Each group will create/write/practice a short skit

	that highlights the selected component that will be performed in front of their peers.
10:30 – 10:45	Break
10:45 – 12:00	Facilitator will lead participants in an activity. • Groups will perform and observe a series of short skits that demonstrate components of effective professional learning communities that were discussed earlier in the day. Each group should appoint a spokesperson to share for the group. • After each skit, open the floor up to discussion about participants' observations of the PLC components they viewed.
12:00 – 1:00	Lunch
1:00 – 1:45	Facilitator will continue guiding participants in an activity. • Groups will continue performing and observing a series of short skits that demonstrate components of effective professional learning communities that were discussed earlier in the day. • After each skit, open the floor up to discussion about participants' observations of the PLC components they viewed.
1:45 – 2:00	Break
2:00 – 3:00	Facilitator will guide participants in an activity. • Grade-level chairpersons will lead a discussion in their groups. Colleagues will share knowledge gained and their understanding of professional learning communities. Each group will be asked to focus on the following and then present/share with the entire group. o What are your PLC goals for the upcoming year? • Teachers will revisit the K-W-L chart that was created during the Day 2 Icebreaker Activity to add to "L" column. • A concluding activity will provide an opportunity for teachers to apply what they have learned in the training. There will be a question/answer session. • Facilitator will explain the purpose of the feedback form, distribute form, and allow time for teachers to complete form (Professional Development 3-Day Training Session Teacher Evaluation)

Professional Development 3-Day Training Session
PowerPoint Slides to Accompany Agenda



Slide 1



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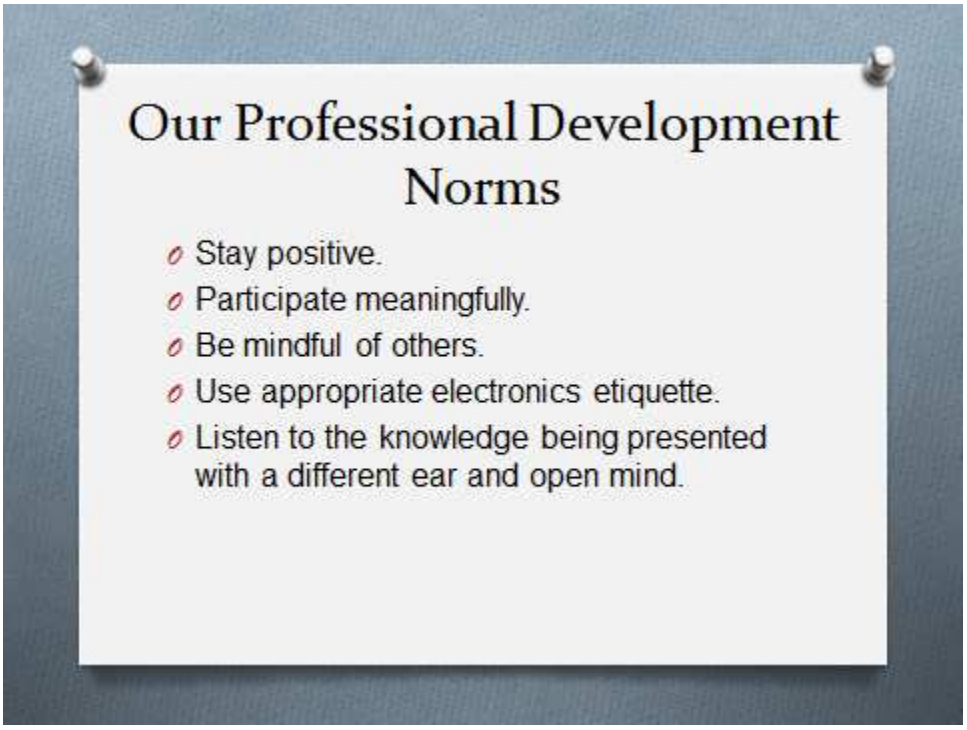
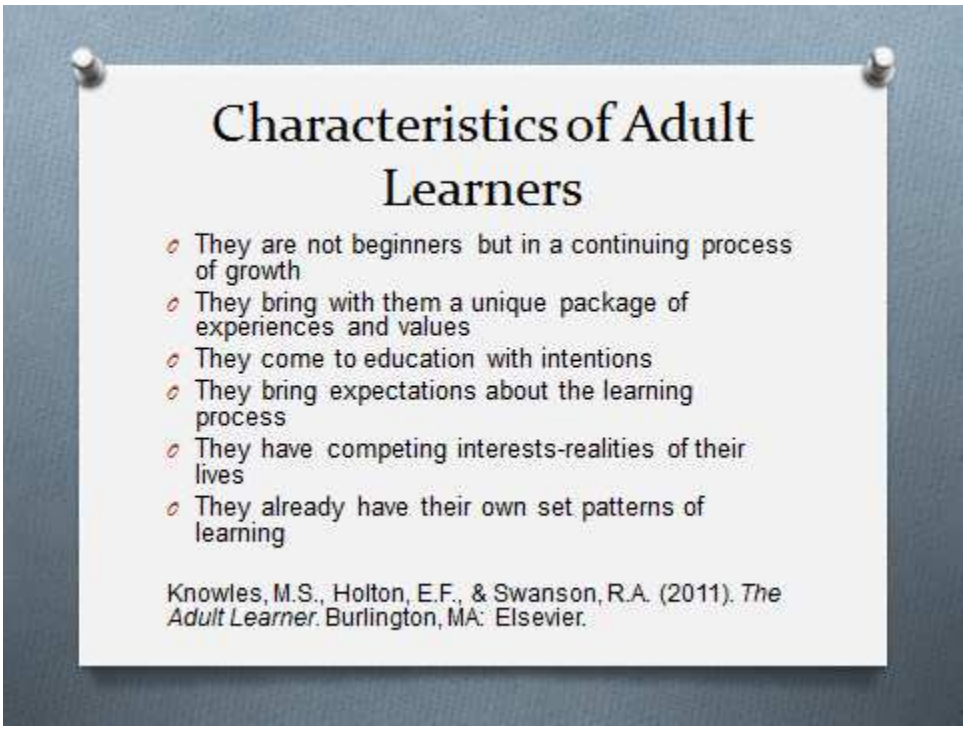


Slide 3



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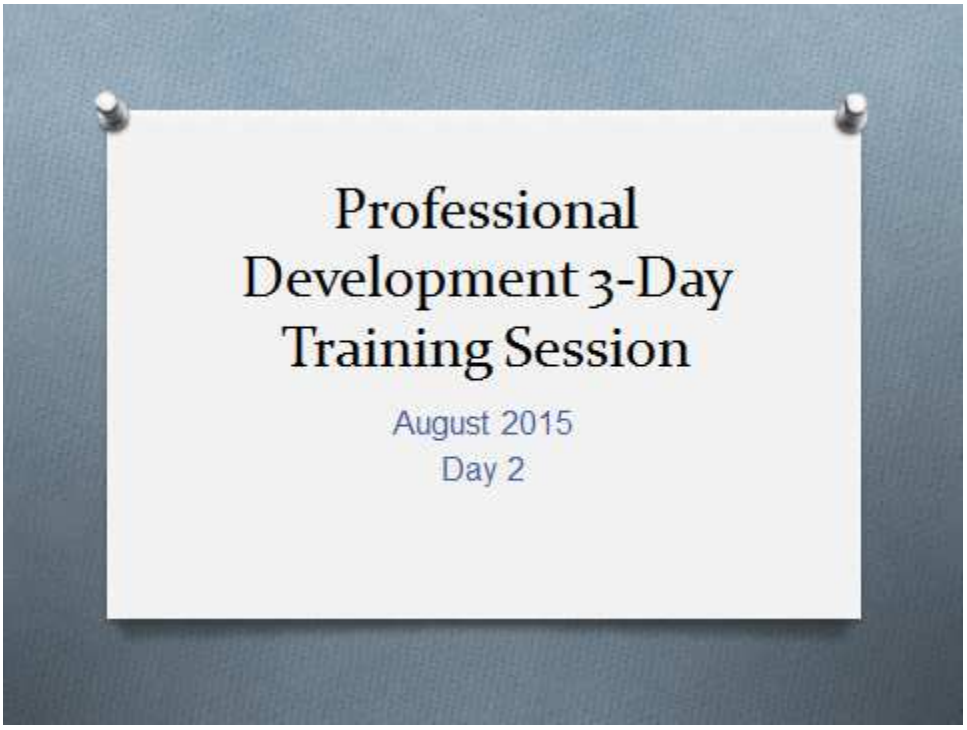
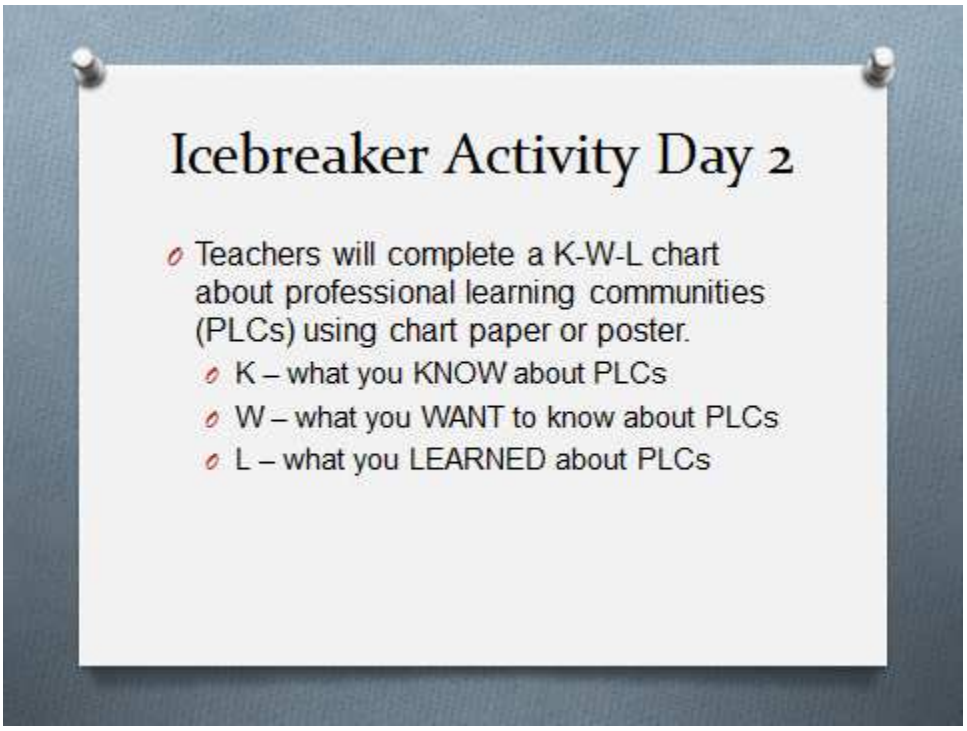


Slide 5



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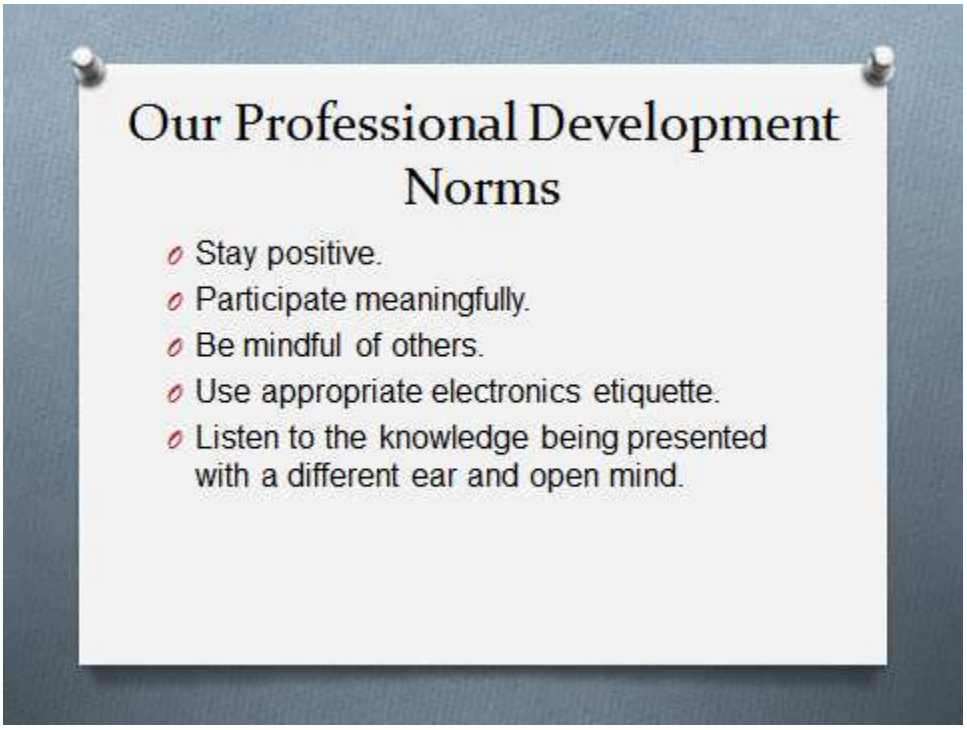

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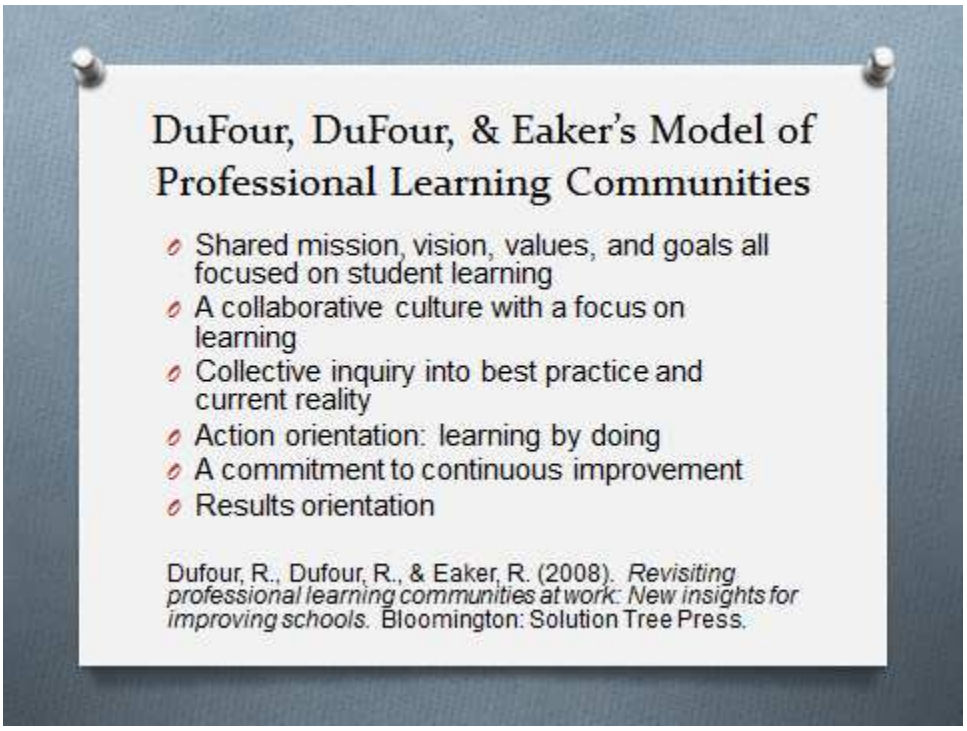

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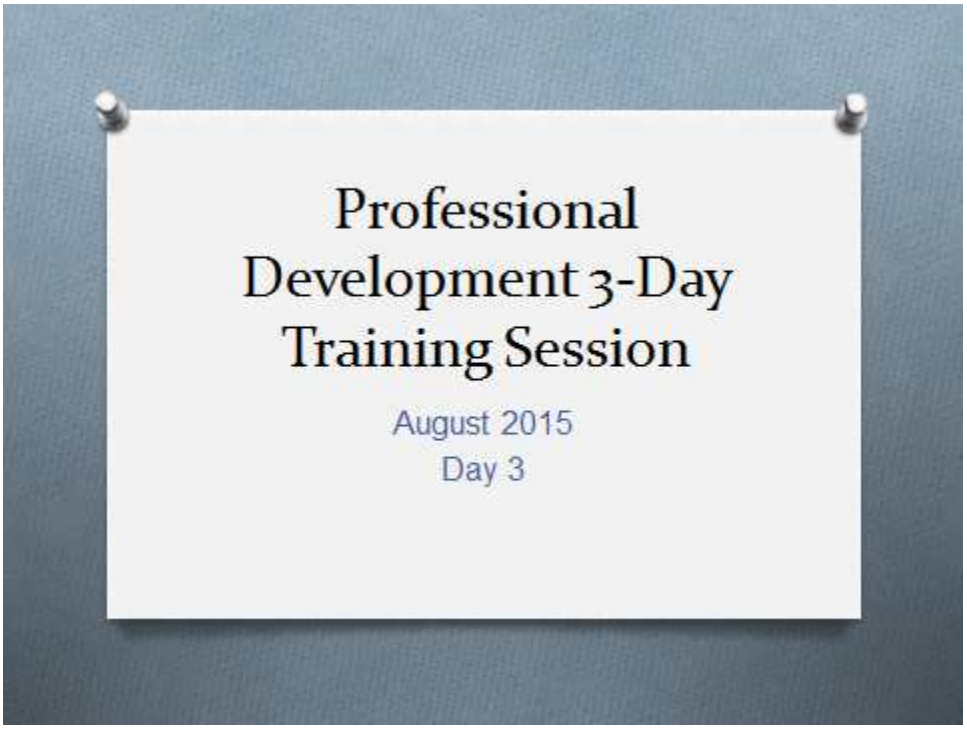
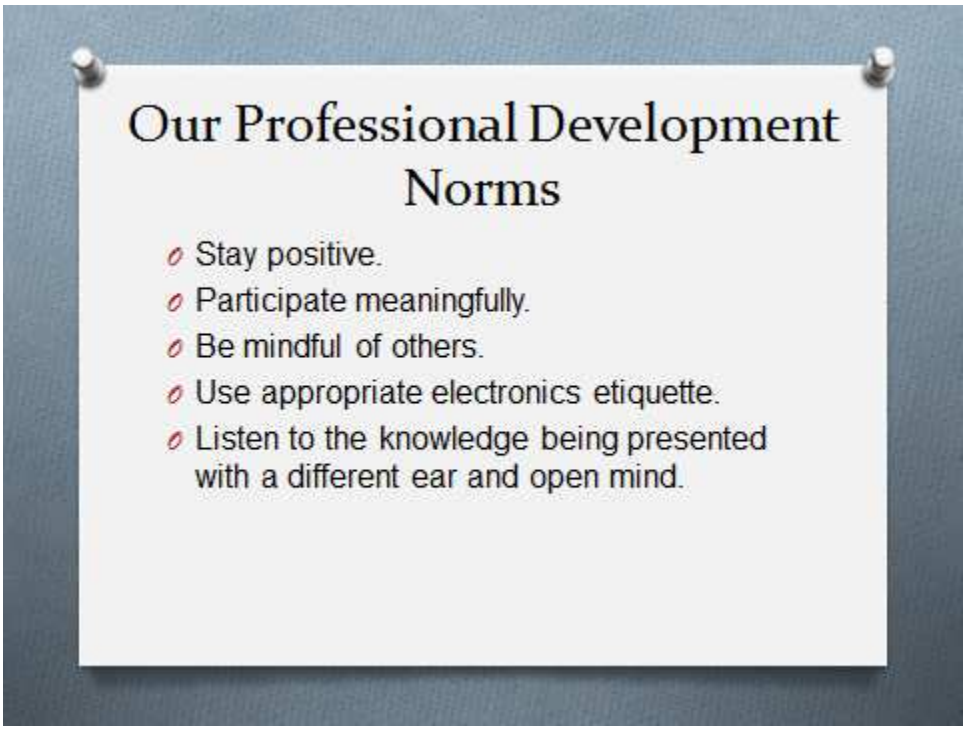
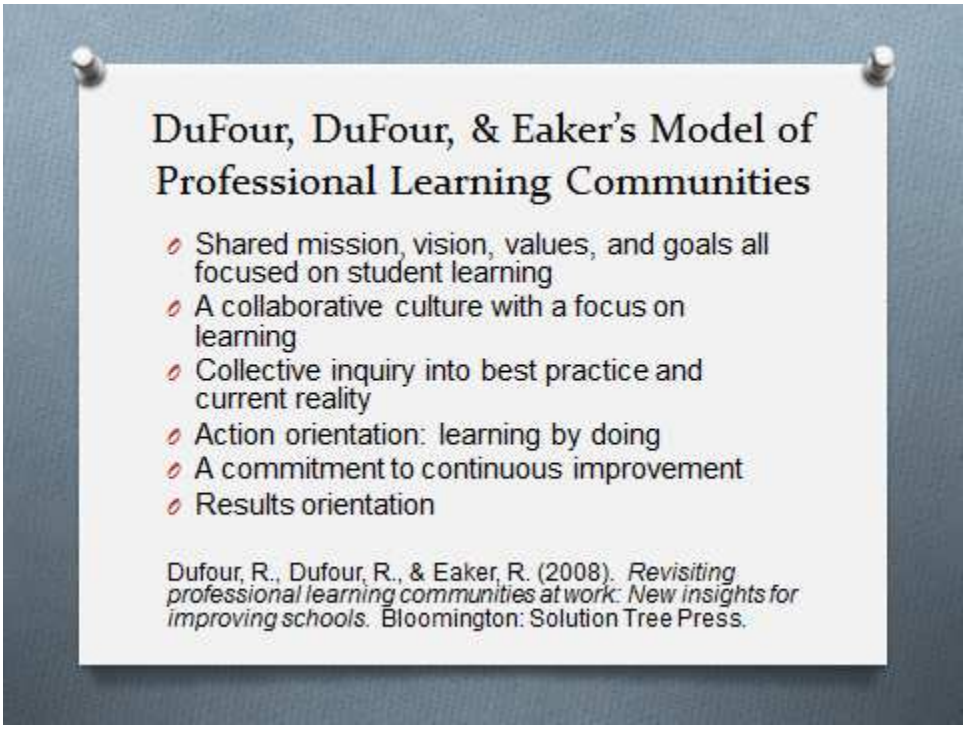


Slide 9



Slide 10


DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker's Model of Professional Learning Communities
Shared mission, vision, values, and goals all focused on student learning
A collaborative culture with a focus on learning
Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality
Action orientation: learning by doing
A commitment to continuous improvement
Results orientation
Dufour, R., Dufour, R., & Eaker, R. (2008). Revisiting professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools. Bloomington: Solution Tree Press.

Slide 11

Professional Development 3-Day Training Session
Handout 1

Characteristics of Effective Professional Development: A Checklist			
	Yes	Partly	No
Supportive			
Does it combine the needs of individuals with school/district goals?			
Does it engage teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators?			
Does it address the learning needs of specific schools, classrooms, grade levels, and/or teachers?			
Does it accommodate varying teaching assignments, career stages, and teacher responses to educational innovation?			
Does it accommodate individual learning styles and preferences?			
Does it integrate teacher input and allow teachers to make choices?			
Job-embedded			
Does it connect to teachers' daily responsibilities?			
Does it include follow up activities that require teachers to apply their learning?			
Does it require teachers to reflect in writing?			
Instructional-focus			
Does it emphasize improving student learning outcomes?			
Does it address subject area *and* how to teach it?			
Does it help teachers to anticipate student misconceptions?			
Does it equip teachers with a wide range of instructional strategies?			
Collaborative			
Does it engage teachers physically, cognitively, and emotionally?			
Does it engage teachers socially in working together toward common goals?			
Does it require teachers to give and receive peer feedback?			
Ongoing			
Does it require a high number of contact hours over several months' time?			
Does it provide teachers with many opportunities over time to interact with ideas and procedures or practice new skills?			
Does it "build" on or relate to other professional development experiences in which teachers are required to engage?			

Hunzicker, J. (2011). Effective professional development for teachers: A checklist. *Professional Development in Education, 37*(2), 177-179.

Professional Development 3-Day Training Session
Grade-Level Chairperson Evaluation

Thank you for participating in the Professional Development 3-Day Training Session. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the presenter and help make informed decisions regarding professional learning communities at your school.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

This professional development activity's objectives were clearly stated.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity's objectives were met.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity helped me better understand what a PLC is.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity helped me better understand my role in a PLC.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity has taught me how to collaborate and communicate with my PLC.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity has taught me how to better facilitate effective PLCs.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity helped me understand the characteristics of adult learners.	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, this professional development activity was a successful experience for me.	1	2	3	4	5

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development activity.

What support will you need in order to be a successful facilitator of grade-level PLCs?

Please make any suggestions as to how you can receive the support you've requested.

Professional Development 3-Day Training Session
Teacher Evaluation

Thank you for participating in the Professional Development 3-Day Training Session. Please take a few minutes to complete the evaluation below. Your feedback will provide valuable information to the presenter and help make informed decisions regarding professional learning communities at your school.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

This professional development activity's objectives were clearly stated.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity's objectives were met.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity helped me better understand what a PLC is.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity helped me better understand my role in a PLC.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity has taught me how to collaborate in a PLC.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity has taught me how to better plan effective PLCs.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity has taught me how to better implement effective PLCs.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity included presentations that were well organized and informational.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development activity was current and appropriate for my professional growth.	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, this professional development activity was a successful experience for me.	1	2	3	4	5

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development activity.

After participating in this professional development activity, has your perception of professional learning communities changed? If so, how?

Request for Additional Time for PLCs

To the [redacted] County School District Level Administration:

First I would like to commend the [redacted] County School District Level Administration for the support provided to the [redacted] County schools. By working together, I believe we can continue to increase student achievement and provide effective professional development for our teachers. Improvement in these two areas is the reason I am writing this recommendation to the [redacted] County School District Level Administration.

Two years ago ABC school began the implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs). This implementation was based on current educational research stating that PLCs have the potential to increase student achievement, promote collaboration among teachers, and provide effective professional development for teachers. The literature provides many examples of successful PLC implementation. In PLCs, teachers work together to identify essential learning, determine learning strategies for teachers to deliver content, evaluate student performance based on data, and then adjust instructional practice to best serve the needs of all students.

In PLCs, the activities mentioned above take time to complete successfully. Time is identified as one of the barriers for successful PLC implementation. I found that teachers need time to discuss student progress, educational practice, examine best practices, and address difficult questions which require extensive time together. Time is very important in planning and implementing effective PLCs. I would like to make a request for additional time for PLCs to meet during the upcoming school year. I have recently completed my doctoral study on PLC implementation at Walden University and have found that the lack of time is a deterrent to PLC implementation at ABC School. I hope that the [redacted] County School District Level Administration will really consider this request and be willing to discuss this matter further. Surely we can work together to provide additional time for PLCs to meet during the upcoming school year.

Thanking you in advance for your cooperation,

Quonias Hudson

ABC School

Appendix B: Creswell's Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

(Briefly describe the research study, confidentiality, and informed consent)

Before the interview, remember to greet the participant and thank him/her for participating in the study. I am conducting a research study on elementary school teachers' perspectives of professional learning communities. Thank you for reviewing and signing the informed consent form which provided more information detailing the study, confidentiality, and the exact parameters of your requested participation. Please remember, during the course of this study and its' subsequent findings, your identity will remain confidential. If at any time you want to leave the study, you are free to do so. Once again, thank you for signing the informed consent form stating that you are aware of your rights as a participant of this study. If you have any questions, feel free to ask them now or contact my chair or me using the contact information provided on the informed consent form. At the end of the interview, thank the participant once again and remind them of the member check process that will occur at a later date and take 15 – 20 minutes.

Interview Questions

1. Could you please describe your background in education?
2. You have been participating in a professional learning community for the past two years. Based on your experiences and what you know about professional learning communities, what do you feel are its' strengths and weaknesses as a model of professional development?

3. What are your views on collaborating with colleagues? Follow-up question: How has collaboration helped or hindered your professional growth as an educator?
4. Professional learning communities require participants to learn, plan, and work together, or collaborate. Describe your professional learning community experiences as it relates to collaborating with your colleagues.
5. Tell me how your participation in professional learning communities has influenced the decisions you make regarding classroom instruction.
6. Please describe ways in which your participation in professional learning communities has impacted the decisions you make regarding classroom management.
7. Do you believe the collaboration that occurs during professional learning community meetings have the ability to increase teachers' learning and professional growth? Why or why not?
8. What suggestions, if any, do you have for improving your current professional learning community? Follow-up question: What are some things you would not change about your professional learning community?

Appendix C: Sample Interview Transcript

Interviewer: Could you please describe your background in education?

Participant: Well, I have a BS degree in education, I'm gifted certified, and I have a master's degree in science education with a focus on reading and literacy. And this is my 14th year teaching.

Interviewer: Have all of your 14 years been in elementary school?

Participant: Yes. I've taught third, fourth, and fifth grades.

Interviewer: You have been participating in a professional learning community for the past 2 years. Based on your experiences and what you know about professional learning communities, what do you feel are its strengths and weaknesses as a model of professional development?

Participant: PLCs are communities used to establish teams that focus on the overall improvement of student learning. I feel its strengths are working with and learning from other educators that have shared values, visions, and missions about education. Some of the weaknesses are having to collaborate with people who do not want to collaborate, unsupportive administrators not holding high expectations for all teachers, and the ever changing ideas of what works best in the classroom.

Interviewer: What are your views on collaborating with colleagues?

Participant: I think that collaborating with other teachers is the key to the overall success of my students.

Interviewer: How has collaboration helped or hindered your professional growth as an educator?

Participant: Collaboration has helped me grow as an educator.

Interviewer: How so?

Participant: Well, I feel as though I benefit in a variety of ways when working with other teachers. And I believe there is a connection between raised student achievement and positive teacher relationships. We work hard to look at student data and use it to determine the learning needs of our students. My professional learning community helped

me review standards and design programs that helped improve instruction, especially in math. I do not think collaboration has hindered my professional growth at all.

Interviewer: Professional learning communities require participants to learn, plan, and work together, or collaborate. Describe your professional learning community experiences as it relates to collaborating with your colleagues.

Participant: First, I would have to say that I totally agree with you. PLCs require participants to learn, plan, and collaborate. My professional learning experience as it relates to collaboration is basically working together. We work together to analyze our classroom practices. While analyzing classroom practices, we work to improve these practices and learn from one another. We capitalize on our strengths and use it to collaborate on units, lessons, and overall ideas.

Interviewer: Tell me how your participation in professional learning communities has influenced the decisions you make regarding classroom instruction.

Participant: Basically, my participation in professional learning communities on a grade level basis has influenced my decisions regarding classroom instruction.

Interviewer: Tell me more.

Participant: Well, PLCs allow me to monitor student progress on grade level goals and improve my teaching and the learning process of my students.

Interviewer: Please describe ways in which your participation in professional learning communities has impacted the decisions you make regarding classroom management.

Participant: I am glad you asked that question. We spend most of our time in PLCs discussing behavior problems.

Interviewer: Is there enough time to discuss student learning?

Participant: No. When I think about it, I find that we do not have enough time to address all of our concerns.

Interviewer: I can understand.

Participant: My participation in PLCs on a grade level basis has influenced my decisions regarding classroom management.

Interviewer: Okay. How has your participation in PLCs impacted the decisions you make regarding classroom management?

Participant: Well, we discuss the importance of teacher-student relationships and how they are critical to a successful classroom.

Interviewer: What do you collaborate on?

Participant: Well. *(pause)* For the most part, we collaborate on rules, policies, and procedures that we want in place for our students in classrooms and on our grade level.

Interviewer: Do you feel that your team members contribute equally to the discussions?

Participant: Not really. Sometimes they have a hard time sharing their ideas with a group and other times they're preoccupied with non-school related issues.

Interviewer: Why do you say that?

Participant: Well, I don't think teachers understand their roles in a PLC. Nor do they know a lot about PLCs.

Interviewer: What do you think they need?

Participant: Teachers need professional development on how to plan and implement PLCs.

Interviewer: I understand. Do you believe the collaboration that occurs during professional learning community meetings have the ability to increase teachers' learning and professional growth?

Participant: Yes, I believe it does.

Interviewer: Why?

Participant: I do believe that the collaboration that occurs during professional learning communities has the ability to increase teachers' learning and professional growth. I think it increases my effectiveness as I collaborate and discuss theories, research, models, and strategies put into place to achieve student success.

Interviewer: What suggestions, if any, do you have for improving your current professional learning community?

Participant: Well, I believe in the power of professional learning communities. However, I do not believe that it is being done well at my school. I am depending on my team to create the professional learning community instead of my school or administration. *(pause)* I do not always feel like professional learning community activities that I am required to attend have anything to do with me or my students.

Interviewer: Could you elaborate?

Participant: For one, I think teachers will be more excited about collaborating when topics are more grade level specific. Teachers want to feel like they can take the information being learned and apply it to their classroom immediately.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Participant: I am saying that the information must be useful and meaningful for great collaboration and success to take place.

Interviewer: Oh, I see. Well… What are some things you would not change about your professional learning community?

Participant: I would not change the members of my PLC. I work with wonderful people.

Interviewer: Thank you for taking time out of your busy schedule to interview with me. I will be in touch.

Appendix D: Interview Responses

	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7
1. Could you please describe your background in education?	This is my 21st year as an educator. The first 7 years were as a 1st grade teacher, 5 years as an EIP reading teacher for grades K-3, 5 years as a 2nd grade teacher and the past 3 years as a 4th grade teacher.	I have been teaching for 12 years. I have a B.S. in Middle Grades Education, a Masters in Instructional Technology, and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership. I have taught grades 3-6, all subjects.	I have been teaching elementary school for 22 years.	I've been a special education teacher for 7 years.	I have a BS degree in Education, am gifted certified, and have a master's degree in Science Education with a focus on reading and literacy. This is my 14th year teaching.	This is my 4th year as an elementary school teacher.	I have a BS degree in elementary education and this is my 26th year teaching.
2. You have been participating in a professional learning community for the past two years. Based on your experiences and what you know about professional learning communities, what do you feel are its' strengths and weaknesses as a model of professional development?	The strengths of a professional learning community are collaborative planning, fresh ideas from your peers, and being able to discuss some of your strengths and weaknesses to build from them. Some weaknesses would be having some of your peers who aren't fully engaged and have no input, but constantly wants yours.	We are able to get others' interpretations of the right way to use information for proper classroom application. The strength is definitely collaboration. Being able to hear various perspectives gives us all some support with our ideas and how to apply them. The weakness of PLCs is that you have to find time to do them. Even if its technology-based with online forums, you still have to find a way to get everyone on. Also, some people are not open to sharing in these groups. It can be intimidating to some to give their	I believe PLCs reduce teacher isolation, create shared responsibilities among teachers, provide a forum for learning as a team, and improve teaching and learning. Some weaknesses are that PLCs are not effective when teachers are not given enough time during the school day to share ideas and materials.	I think it's great that we have a platform to share ideas and information and strategies with our colleagues. This is definitely a strength of having a professional learning community. A weakness would be the level of involvement from everyone is not consistent or equal.	PLCs are communities used to establish teams that focus on the overall improvement of student learning. I feel its strengths are working with and learning from other educators that have shared values, visions, and missions about education. The weaknesses are having to collaborate with people who do not want to collaborate, unsupportive administrators not holding high expectations for all teachers), and the ever changing ideals of what works best in the	I feel the strengths of PLCs are the collaborative discussions and planning sessions with my colleagues. A weakness would be the different levels of commitment and attention some of my colleagues give during PLC meetings.	A strength of participating in a professional learning community is coming together with my colleagues to share knowledge, ideas, and strategies about how students learn and best practices to implement in our classrooms. I would have to say a weakness of using professional learning communities as a model of professional development is the lack of consistency throughout the building in terms of what is expected.

		perspective on an educational approach or application.			classroom.		
3. What are your views on collaborating with colleagues? Follow-up question: How has collaboration helped or hindered your professional growth as an educator?	Collaboration is great if everyone is involved.	It's cool as long as we are giving varying perspectives. Sometimes it can be an exercise in redundancy. I don't necessarily need confirmation that my ideas are right. I have definitely gotten some new perspectives about the pedagogy and how to apply varying programs in my classroom.	My views on collaborating with colleagues can be summed up by saying teachers learn best from other teachers. Teachers grow when they feel connected to their colleagues. Teachers also build relationships that will last. Collaboration has helped me grow as an educator because my colleagues and I are more valuable collectively than on our own. I learn from my colleagues.	I think collaborating is definitely necessary since I'm a special education teacher who pushes in to the classroom. Collaborating with my co-workers has helped me grow as an educator because I learn strategies and get ideas from a lot of different teachers.	I think that collaborating with other teachers is key to the overall success of my students. I benefit in a variety of ways when working with other teachers and believe that there is a connection between raised student achievement and positive teacher relationships. We work hard to look at student data and use it to determine the learning needs of our students. My professional learning community helped me review the standards and design programs that helped improve instruction, especially in math. I do not think collaboration has hindered my professional growth at all.	I enjoy collaborating with my colleagues because I consider myself to still be a new teacher and I like learning from the more experienced teachers around me. I definitely feel collaborating has helped me grow professionally because I have a great grade-level who support me and they share great ideas and strategies that I sometimes use in my classroom.	I believe collaborating with my colleagues is an awesome way to share, plan, and learn with one another. In my years as an educator, collaboration has definitely helped me grow professionally.
4. Professional learning communities require participants to learn, plan, and work	My professional learning community could be great if I had others willing to put in work without	We were reading a specific book about a program we were using. We had basically time to read	I have found that most of my colleagues share the same goals as I do. Sitting down as a team and	Well, because my schedule is different from the teachers of the students I serve, I usually have	My professional learning experience as it relates to collaboration is basically working together. We	My grade level professional learning community is great. I believe we work well together	I've found my professional learning community experiences to be mostly positive. Occasionally

together, or collaborate. Describe your professional learning community experiences as it relates to collaborating with your colleagues.	complaining.	and work through various chapters. We came together to discuss the chapters and how to apply them in the classroom. We heard different ideas on how to use the information. We then created lessons in groups, bouncing ideas off of each other. We then applied what we had learned and discussed how our lessons worked out and what we needed to do to fix any mix-ups.	engaging in ongoing discussions, I feel that this really increases my commitment to the goals of the school. But I do feel that there is not enough time to have meaningful discussions.	to meet up with the teachers after school. I like being part of the planning process and sharing ideas with grade level teachers, but I very seldom get the chance to do those things because of time constraints. I do have other PLC meetings with teachers from the SE department where I do get the chance to hear and share ideas.	work together to analyze our classroom practices. While analyzing our classroom practices, we work to improve these practices and learn from one another. We capitalize on our strengths and use it to collaborate on units, lessons, and overall ideas.	when it comes to sharing ideas and planning units or lessons for our students.	we will have a gripe session that is not focused on what we should be doing, but for the most part we focus on the task at hand and get the job done.
5. Tell me how your participation in professional learning communities has influenced the decisions you make regarding classroom instruction.	When I was in a professional community that shared the same passion for teaching as me, it made me a better teacher. I was able to build off of their ideas and teaching style.	Many times the learning community was specific to a program. Thus, many of my experiences have given me the ability to do various programs of learning and study in the classroom effectively. Some elements I have held on to in conjunction with programs we subscribe to now.	My participation in PLCs has influenced the decisions I make regarding classroom instruction in a positive way. By participating in PLCs, I have learned to take ownership of my learning, which has caused me to change my instruction. I focus on learning and teaching; not just teaching practices. I realize that being an active participant in	I've learned some great small group and differentiated instruction strategies during PLCs that I take into the classrooms with me when I serve my special ed. students using the push-in model.	My participation in professional learning communities on a grade level basis has influenced my decisions regarding classroom instruction. PLCs allow me to monitor student progress on grade level goals and improve my teaching and the learning process of my students.	My classroom instruction is influenced by the discussions during our grade level PLCs because we sit down together and use the county curriculum maps to plan special lessons, projects, and upcoming units.	Well through PLCs, we've set and reviewed learning goals for our students, planned lessons, field trips, and other learning activities that have influenced what I do in my classroom.

			PLCs can increase my knowledge and skills to implement practical strategies and improve student learning.				
6. Please describe ways in which your participation in professional learning communities has impacted the decisions you make regarding classroom management.	It has made me realize that if rituals and routines aren't established early, you have a problem with classroom management.	My participation in PLCs has not impacted my classroom management practices. Although I share management strategies with my colleagues, I seem to have a pretty good grasp on managing my students.	My participation in PLCs has impacted the decisions I make regarding classroom management in a positive way as well. I have engaged in PLCs and found that working with colleagues shed light on the importance of share responsibility for students' behavior. My colleagues and I collaborate to address classroom management issues.	I've found that some classroom management strategies work and others do not. I typically have less behavioral problems from students who have teachers with strong classroom management skills.	My participation in professional learning communities on a grade level basis has influenced my decisions regarding classroom management. We discuss the importance of teacher-student relationships and how they are critical to a successful classroom. We collaborate on rules, policies, and procedures that we want in place for our students in classrooms and on our grade level.	As a grade level we have similar, if not the same, classroom rules and consequences for the students on our grade level.	Well, I've learned several classroom management techniques through years of trial and error, but some I've actually learned by participating in professional learning communities. The ones I've learned about in PLCs most recently have definitely worked because they incorporate technology and behavior monitoring. The technology part really gets the kids excited.
7. Do you believe the collaboration that occurs during professional learning community meetings have the ability to increase teachers' learning and professional growth? Why or why not?	It does have the ability to increase teachers' learning if everyone brings something to offer.	It is definitely important to professional growth because teachers learn by doing and applying things we get from other teachers. My teaching style has been influenced by what I have learned and seen others do. PLCs have allowed	Yes, I believe the collaboration that occurs during professional learning community meetings have the ability to increase teachers' learning and professional growth because teachers collaborate with one	I believe it does because people learn from others and teachers are no different. We learn by watching and imitating what we see or hear works in someone else's classroom.	I do believe that the collaboration that occurs during professional learning communities has the ability to increase teachers' learning and professional growth. I think it increases my effectiveness as I collaborate	Yes and no. If everyone involved in the meeting is actually engaged, it could increase professional growth. But if people are not focused or paying attention, it's not going to work.	Yes, I strongly feel as though collaborating during professional learning community meetings can increase teachers' learning and professional growth. But this increase can only happen if the teacher or teachers get involved in

		me to specifically bounce ideas off of experienced teachers and gain knowledge from those who have a varying perspective.	another to develop lesson plans, address individual students' learning needs, and share best practices.		and discuss theories, research, models, and strategies put into place to achieve student success.		what is going on during the meeting and take an active role in the process.
8. What suggestions, if any, do you have for improving your current professional learning community? Follow-up question: What are some things you would not change about your professional learning community?	To improve my professional learning community, I plan to bring optimism, new information and ideas.	I don't have any suggestions at this time.	My current PLC should be structured during the school day. One thing I would not change is the extended opportunity to contribute to a group and collaborative with my colleagues. I enjoy sharing stories and advice with colleagues.	I think we should have a day designated for special area and special education teachers to collaborate with homeroom teachers at least once every grade reporting period.	I believe in the power of professional learning communities. However, I do not believe that it is being done well at my school. I am depending on my team to create the professional learning community instead of my school or administratio n. I do not always feel like professional learning community activities that I am required to attend have anything to do with me or my students. I think teachers will be more excited about collaborating when topics are more grade level specific. Teachers want to feel like they can take the information being learned and apply it to their classroom immediately.	I believe my grade level PLC is working pretty well. But the school level PLC should focus more on student needs and teacher requests.	As a school, I believe we should re-establish the goals, procedures, and teacher expectations for our school's professional learning community.

					Information must be useful and meaningful for great collaboration and success to take place.		