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Walden University
2015

Abstract

Increasing School Commitment by Listening to Veteran Teachers' Needs and Concerns

by

Carrie McAtee

MLIS, University of South Florida, 2004

BS, University of Georgia, 1992

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

November 2015

Abstract

The role that support systems play in new teachers' levels of school commitment has been widely documented. However, veteran teachers' levels of commitment have not been as closely studied. According to the department of education in a Southeastern state, the veteran teacher attrition rate at a Title I school in an urban school district was in the double digits for several years. High veteran teacher attrition rates and low levels of commitment can cause problems such as loss of continuity of instruction for students. The purpose of this study was to identify veteran teachers' perceptions of their levels of school commitment and how the district can support and retain veteran educators. Self-determination theory, as it relates to the satisfaction of teachers' needs and concerns in the context of their work environment, formed the conceptual framework for this study. The study was implemented to explore research questions related to veteran teachers' needs and concerns, working conditions, and supports. A case study research design was utilized. Interview data were collected from a criterion-based, purposeful sample of 10 veteran teachers. These data were analyzed inductively for common themes and patterns and resulted in findings based on veteran teachers' needs and concerns such as greater district and parent support and job-embedded professional development. A project was developed based on the findings to address the problem. The project focused on creating professional learning communities to support veteran teachers and increase their levels of school commitment. Positive social change can result from creating these professional learning communities for veteran teachers in order to address their needs and concerns, such as greater school commitment for veteran teachers and more continuity of instruction for students, which will result in higher academic achievement.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the teachers at the study site, both novices and veterans, who are on the front lines every day preparing their students to become contributing members of society. It's not an easy job, but the rewards are enumerable. It is my hope that this research will provide some insight into what your needs and concerns are so that administrators and district officials can provide what is needed for Title I veteran teachers to be effective and feel supported. It is also my hope that your students will reap the benefits of a stable teaching force and the resulting continuity of instruction. I also dedicate this study to Michelle. Future students lost a wonderful teacher who would have done great things in this world. I "just keep swimming" because you taught us that life is about continuing on even when it gets tough.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the staff at the study site for their valuable contribution to this study and the resulting dissertation. Thank you also to my family, who encouraged me and supported me along this journey. I could not have done this without you. I especially want to thank my friends, who cheered me on and never let me give up. And finally, this page wouldn't be complete without many, many thanks going to my committee: Dr. Jenelle Braun-Monegan, Dr. Mark Low, Dr. Robert McClure, and Dr. Tom Cavanagh. Thank you for your invaluable feedback and advice and for helping me progress from point A to point Z in one piece.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the needs and concerns of veteran teachers, as well as the implications for veteran teacher school commitment and attrition, in a Title I elementary school. According to an analyst at the state's department of education (personal communication, January 9, 2015), the veteran teacher attrition rate at the study site, which was a high-poverty Title I elementary school in a large, urban school district, had been in the double digits for several years. Veteran teacher attrition rates can be a problem for a myriad of reasons, not the least of which is continuity of instruction for students (Grissom, 2011). The effects are even worse in high-poverty schools when teachers, especially experienced teachers, leave for a more affluent school or another field altogether (Freedman & Appleman, 2009).

The research was based on self-determination theory (SDT; Ryan & Deci, 2000) as it relates to the satisfaction of teachers' teaching-related psychological needs and their levels of engagement and emotional exhaustion. My goal was to understand the participants' perspectives regarding how the district can support and retain veteran teachers in a Title I school by increasing understanding of their needs and concerns. In order to accomplish this goal, the research design was a heuristic case study (Merriam, 2009; Hatch, 2002). Semistructured interviews, which included questions related to their needs and concerns as well as their levels of school commitment, were the primary form of data collection (Merriam, 2009).

Section 1 contains a definition and evidence of the problem at the local level, as well as evidence of the problem from the professional literature. The significance of the study, the research questions, and an explanation of the theoretical basis for the study are also included. Finally, a review of the literature, including research on teacher attrition, teacher perspectives, and targeted support, is discussed in the context of low socioeconomic status (LSES) schools. The data were collected in hopes of giving a voice to veteran teachers in a Title I school in order to assist in understanding their perspectives regarding their needs and concerns, as well as whether this understanding can increase the veteran teachers' levels of school commitment as it relates to attrition.

Definition of the Problem

The context of this study can be felt on a local and a national level. Locally, the problem prompting this study was the lack of understanding of veteran teachers' needs and concerns in an urban, high-poverty, Title I school, as well as the veteran teachers' levels of school commitment and attrition. The state's department of education website listed the demographics of the study site: over 80% of the students qualified for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL) and the population consisted of approximately 70% Hispanic, 20% African American, 8% Caucasian American, and 2% multiracial students. For the past 4 years (2010-2014), the turnover of veteran teachers at the study site contributed to an overall double digit attrition rate. According to the principal (personal communication, June 18, 2014), the study site had had difficulty retaining veteran teachers. Veteran teacher attrition rates and low levels of commitment can be a problem for many reasons, including loss of continuity of instruction for students (Collie, Shapka,

& Perry, 2011; Grissom, 2011). The effects are even worse in high-poverty schools when teachers, especially experienced teachers, leave for a more affluent school or another field altogether (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). The district must spend money to recruit, hire, train, and support new teachers every year. In the 2013-2014 school year, nearly 700 new teachers were hired for the school district where the study site was located. The district had averaged about 6,000 teachers for over 90,000 students. Consequently, for the school year 2013-2014, about 15% of teachers were "new" to the system.

In the field of education, support for teachers varies according to years of experience: much attention is paid to the support and retention of teachers who are new to the profession (Wechsler, Caspary, Humphrey, & Matsuko, 2010). Within the first 3 years of their careers, new teachers in some school districts are provided with support from a mentor (Wechsler et al., 2010). In addition, new teachers may receive targeted professional development so that they can be more successful as they navigate their way through their first years as educators (Wechsler et al., 2010). However, Darling-Hammond (2010) documented how new teachers are statistically more likely to leave within the first 3 years of their careers as educators. Some estimates, according to Darling-Hammond, placed the costs of teacher attrition into the billions of dollars. Schools invest a lot of time, money, and resources in their new teachers (Collie et al., 2011). To help slow the tide of attrition and its resulting costs and ensure greater school commitment, schools should make every effort to ensure that their investments pay off by enabling those teachers to stay in position long enough to acquire veteran status (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005).

There was a new teacher program at the target school for this study, which included information on procedures, benefits, professional development, resources, and curriculum. According to the curriculum support teacher at the school (personal communication, April 11, 2014), new teachers also received ongoing support for the first 3 years from an assigned teacher mentor. Once teachers finished their third year in the classroom and began their fourth year, they were considered "tenured." However, teachers who were in their fourth year and beyond did not have a targeted support program. According to McCann and Johanneson (2004), teachers in their fourth or fifth years can still be at risk for higher rates of attrition. McCann and Johanneson found that teachers in the first 5 years of their careers are more susceptible to attrition because of difficult working conditions or the lure of better paying jobs in other fields. One third of all new teachers leave within that 5-year period (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, if a teacher had reached the 6-year mark, he or she earned the "veteran" title.

According to the state's department of education executive summary, the school district where the study site was located did not have a format for understanding the specific needs and concerns of veteran teachers beyond infrequent classroom observations and benchmark student performance assessments. Lack of understanding of the needs and concerns of veteran teachers may be a factor that predicts the rate of veteran teacher attrition and their levels of school commitment (Collie et al., 2011). School administrators often overlook the needs of veteran teachers or assume the teacher has taken care of them on his or her own. (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Day & Gu, 2009).

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) was the educational reform passed by the Bush administration that was designed to have all students become proficient in reading and math by the year 2014. Because of this legislation, teachers have had to juggle increasingly diverse roles and demands to keep up with the resulting climate of high-stakes testing and accountability (Rubin, 2011).

NCLB added a new level of accountability to add to the challenges associated with teaching in an urban, high-poverty school (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2006). As a result, standardized test scores now carry the weight of determining whether schools meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP, in some cases, determines financial rewards and consequences for school systems (Eslinger, 2014). Teachers who are caught between district-level administrators and school-level administrators in terms of trying to do what is best for their students often feel powerless (Leland & Murtadha, 2011). Increased pressure can often result in teachers choosing to move to a more affluent, non-Title I school or leaving the profession altogether if their school does not achieve AYP (Sass, Hannaway, Xu, Figlio, & Feng, 2012). This creates the need to hire replacement teachers to fill gaps in staffing (Sass et al., 2012).

In the United States, about 65,000 first-year teachers were employed in 1988 (Ingersoll, 2012). Within the next two decades, the number grew to over 200,000 (Ingersoll, 2012). By 2008, teachers with 5 years or fewer of experience made up a quarter of the members of the profession (Ingersoll, 2012). In a 2013 survey conducted by the Professional Association of Georgia Educators (n.d.), over 37% of respondents indicated that they were “unlikely to remain in education for the next 10 years” (para.

10). Supporting and retaining veteran teachers in the teaching force is imperative because teachers with 6 years of experience or more fill important roles in the profession, not the least of which is mentoring first-year teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; Santoro, 2011).

Rationale

Veteran teacher retention and commitment is even more crucial in urban schools, where issues of poverty, high student migration, cultural differences, and low parental involvement make teacher experience and expertise even more valuable (Payne, 2005). There is little understanding of the needs and concerns of veteran teachers who work in a Title I school. The primary rationale for my study was increasing understanding of the needs and concerns of veteran teachers, as well as increasing understanding of their levels of commitment to their school. Additionally, the rationale included the need to determine whether the target school district can support their veteran teachers in its Title I schools through increased understanding of the veteran teachers' needs and concerns and their levels of commitment. Veteran teacher attrition can be problematic at any school, but can be felt more acutely at a Title I school (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). A clearer understanding of the needs and concerns of veteran teachers at this Title I school may increase the likelihood of school commitment, which can contribute to a lower attrition rate and more continuity of instruction for students.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The study site was a metropolitan Title I elementary school that served about 1,100 students in Grades K through 5. The study site was located in a suburb of a major southeastern city and situated near several neighborhoods that were within walking

distance. The population of the surrounding neighborhoods changed over the past decade, moving from mostly White, middle-class families to lower socioeconomic families of color. The school's students were mainly Hispanic (over 70%), including 60% who qualified for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services. Over 80% of the student body qualified for FRPL. The school was staffed by over 80 certified homeroom and support teachers.

According to the last publicly available figures on the district website, teacher attrition at the school nearly doubled in one school year as the student population got larger, and the FRPL rate increased to above 90% as of the 2012-2013 school year:

- In 2010-2011, the teacher attrition rate was 8%.
- In 2011-2012, the rate nearly doubled to 14.6%.

These numbers include the teachers who left the profession or transferred to another system and excluded the teachers who moved to another school within the district or retired. I requested and received more comprehensive attrition data from the state department of education public website. In response to an e-mail request from me, a department of education systems analyst (personal communication, January 9, 2015) provided attrition data that included all teachers who left the school regardless of the reason:

- In 2010-2011, the teacher attrition rate was 18%.
- In 2011-2012, the rate was 26%.
- In 2012-2013, the rate dropped back down to 18%.
- In 2013-2014, the attrition rate increased to 20%.

As part of their 2012-2017 Strategic Plan, the school district would like to have "fewer inexperienced teachers in hard-to-staff subjects and schools; reduced turnover in hard-to-staff schools, [and] increased retention of effective employees." The study site had a double digit attrition rate of teachers for the past four school years, which speaks to the need for "reduced turnover in hard-to-staff schools." The study site was a Title I school with a FRPL rate of over 80%. The majority of its students came from homes where poverty was prevalent and the need for strong, consistent instruction was paramount. These students need experienced teachers who feel supported, are enthusiastic about their jobs, and can effectively juggle the increasing demands placed on them in today's educational climate (Sass et al., 2012).

In addition, Shernoff, Mehta, Atkins, Torf, and Spencer (2011) found that the teachers of students in high-poverty schools often experience limited resources, chronic disruptive student behavior, excessive workload, intense pressure to increase student test scores or risk being labeled as a "failing" school, and worries over student health and well-being. The effect of conditions associated with teaching in an urban, high-poverty school combined with the high-stakes environment created by NCLB creates a unique set of challenges and concerns for teachers (Eslinger, 2014). The teachers at the study site worked with a population wherein approximately 60% of the students received ESOL services and 13% of the students were considered students with disabilities. Test scores from the 2012-2013 school year revealed that as many as 29% of the target school's students "did not meet" the benchmark needed to be considered passing in each of the

main subject areas, including math (26%) and reading (18%). Additionally, over 90% of the target school's students were economically disadvantaged.

A good education for all students, especially those living in poverty, is essential for future success (Payne, 2005). Few qualitative studies have described the influence of the daily pressures on the morale and motivation of veteran teachers in high-poverty schools (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010; Shernoff et al., 2011). Therefore, qualitative research was needed in order to begin to understand the needs and concerns of the target school's veteran teachers, who faced the daily challenges of educating students in a Title I school. Qualitative research gave a voice to the veteran teachers and provided the story behind the numbers. A qualitative study, as opposed to a quantitative study, was appropriate because the "[object] of study" is the meaning that the participants give to their own "socially constructed realities" (Hatch, 2002, p. 30) about their needs and concerns as Title I veteran teachers.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

National statistics have documented increasing attrition rates among teachers at all career stages. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2014) projected that there will be an increase in the number of public school teachers hired in the United States from 222,000 in 1999 to 367,000 in 2022. Between 2011 and 2022, there will be a 29% increase overall in the number of new hires (NCES, 2014). In addition, roughly 10% of the total number of public school teachers in each of those years will be new hires (NCES, 2014). *New hire* refers to those teachers who have never taught before, teachers who were not teaching the previous year, or teachers who have moved from one district

to another district the following year. The NCES report did not cover possible reasons for the increase in the number of new hires, but student enrollment, which is projected to remain fairly flat, is not a factor.

According to the NCES (2014), projections in student enrollment from 2011 to 2022 showed an increase of only 7%. Increased student enrollment can be a reason to hire more teachers. Teacher attrition, however, can also be a significant cause for the need to hire more teachers in order to replace staff members who have moved to another school or have left the profession for a different career field (Eslinger, 2014). New teachers, or those with 3 or fewer years of experience, leave the profession at a rate of 30% within the first 5 years of their careers (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teachers also leave the profession for a variety of other reasons. Reasons for attrition can include family demands, dissatisfaction with working conditions, high stress levels, personal and professional demands, and lack of support from school and district administrators (Cuddapah, Beaty-O'Ferrall, Masci, & Hetrick, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Durham-Barnes, 2011).

Retiring baby boomers, who made up about half of the nation's teaching force within the past decade, also contribute to current attrition rates. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, in a speech given at Columbia University's Teachers College in 2009, remarked that "during the next four years we could lose a third of our veteran teachers…to retirement" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, para. 9). During the same speech, Duncan stated that the U.S. Department of Education was predicting that by the year 2014, the retirement of baby boomers would contribute to the need for new teachers to

fill nearly 1 million teaching positions. Secretary Duncan also acknowledged that "high-poverty, high-needs schools still struggle to attract and retain good teachers" (para. 12). Highly qualified teachers are needed, said Duncan, in order to effectively teach traditionally underserved student populations.

Teacher attrition is difficult for schools to cope with in general, but the effects on high-poverty urban schools are greater (Darling-Hammond, 2010). It is in these schools that teacher attrition is most likely to happen (Darling-Hammond, 2010), thereby running the risk of having a majority of staff with little teaching experience. Little teaching experience can have a direct correlation to teacher effectiveness (Hughes, 2012). The purpose of this study was to determine whether the district can support and retain veteran teachers in this Title I school in order to increase their levels of school commitment, which can contribute to a lower attrition rate and more continuity of instruction for students. For this study, I interviewed a sample of veteran Title I teachers to ascertain what they felt their needs and concerns were in this era of high-stakes accountability and increasing responsibilities.

Definitions

New teacher: A teacher who is in contract years one through three (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teachers who are in Years 4 and 5 could be considered "developing" teachers.

Teacher turnover and *teacher attrition*: These terms are used interchangeably as researchers have referred to the phenomenon of teachers who either transfer to another school or district or who leave the profession altogether (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Whitener,

& Weber, 1997; MacDonald, 1999). For the purposes of this study, *teacher attrition* was used to refer to teachers who either transfer to another school or district or who leave the profession for any reason.

Tenured teacher: According to the school district where the study site was located, a teacher who has accepted a contract for the fourth consecutive year is considered a tenured teacher. Tenured teachers have proven themselves to be "effective" and are only required to be formally observed twice during the school year.

Title I, high-poverty, and *low socioeconomic status (LSES) school*: These terms were used interchangeably throughout this study. Not all Title I schools are necessarily high-poverty. Although *Title I* refers to a school in which 40% or more of the student population is from low income, or low socioeconomic status, households (Editorial Projects in Education Research Center, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2011), this particular site was also considered high poverty because the FRPL rate was over 80%.

*Veteran teacher***:** For the purposes of this study, a veteran teacher was tenured and had at least 6 or more years of teaching experience. At the 6-year mark, teachers have passed the point where they would have been statistically more likely to leave the profession (Yonezawa, Jones, & Singer, 2011).

Significance

The significance of this study included increasing understanding of the veteran teachers' perceptions of their needs and concerns and the reported reasons that influence their decisions to renew their contracts as teachers in high-poverty Title I schools. Understanding their needs and concerns can help support and retain veteran teachers in

high-poverty Title I schools as well as increase their level of commitment to their school, which can lower the attrition rate (Collie et al., 2011). Supporting and retaining veteran teachers in high-poverty Title I schools is essential to providing the stability and consistency in instruction that students need (Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Veteran teacher attrition contributes to schools' loss of investment in professional development, loss of curriculum coordination, and the likelihood that they will be replaced by less effective, novice teachers (Donaldson, 2009).

In a meta-analysis of studies related to teacher effectiveness, Rice (2010) found that teachers with fewer than 3 years of experience were more likely to teach in high-poverty schools. Although the effectiveness of years of experience has been under debate, a survey of 1,076 teachers in the United States (National Center for Education Information, 2011) showed that teachers with 6 or more years of experience perceived themselves as "very competent" in higher percentages than those with fewer than 6 years' experience in areas such as ability to teach subject matter, classroom management, ability to motivate students, and classroom discipline (p. 36). Hammerness et al. (2007) agreed and found that competence in teaching is developed over a 5- to 7-year period:

> Teachers…progress from learning the basic elements of the task to be performed and accumulating knowledge about learning, teaching, and students to making conscious decisions about what they are going to do, reflecting on what is working based on their experience, and, ultimately, at the expert level…sensing the appropriate responses to be made in any given situation. (p. 380)

Years of experience have been shown to be a factor in teachers' perceptions of their effectiveness and can be crucial to student success despite the challenges of teaching in an urban high-poverty school (Hughes, 2012). Effective teachers are critical to the success of students who are already battling the issues that accompany living in poverty (Sass et al., 2012).

Guiding/Research Questions

Although researchers have conducted multiple studies to gather quantitative data on who leaves and who stays in the teaching profession and why, the literature review pointed to a lack of qualitative understanding of the needs and concerns of veteran teachers in high-poverty Title I schools. The central research question guiding data collection was the following: From the veteran teachers' perspective, how can the district support and retain veteran educators in the target school in order to increase their levels of school commitment? Specifically, the following questions were addressed:

1. How do a group of veteran teachers at the target school describe their needs and concerns?
2. What are the perceptions of Title I veteran teachers about their working conditions--including level of resources, mentoring and support, and working with students and families who have a wide range of needs?
3. According to the veteran teachers, what are the targeted supports that could be implemented in order to improve their school commitment and reduce the attrition rate at this Title I school?

Conceptual Framework

Qualitative studies generally follow a constructivist paradigm (Merriam, 2009) in which researchers are interested in how people make sense of and construct meanings from their experiences. Qualitative researchers, according to Hatch (2002), believe that "multiple realities exist that are inherently unique because they are constructed by individuals who experience the world from their own vantage points" (p. 15). SDT relates to how individuals construct meaning from their lives as it investigates "people's inherent growth tendencies and innate psychological needs that are the basis for their self-motivation and…the conditions that foster those processes" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 68). Constructing these meanings, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), feeds directly into SDT and contributes to how individuals perceive that their psychological needs are being met.

SDT

Ryan and Deci (2000) studied SDT as a means to explore how a person's needs such as competence, relatedness, and autonomy are met in the context of their environment, as well as the impact that meeting those needs has on a person's motivation. If their needs are being met, according to Ryan and Deci (2000), people tend to look for new challenges and opportunities, have more positive emotions, and have increased work engagement as a result of autonomous motivation. Being unable to get those needs met, whether by "excessive control, nonoptimal challenges, or lack of connectedness" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 76), can result in "lack of initiative and responsibility [and] in distress" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 76). Researchers found that these conditions and resulting

behaviors often exist for teachers in high-poverty schools (Grissom, 2011; Hughes, 2012; Yonezawa et al., 2011).

SDT and Teachers

Although SDT as it relates to education has commonly been studied in the context of what motivates students in the classroom, it is also necessary for providing individuals such as teachers with motivation for, and commitment to, their jobs. Klassen, Perry, and Frenzel (2012) maintained that applying SDT to the educational workplace provides a lens into how well teachers' needs for feeling competent and autonomous are met in fulfilling their daily responsibilities in the classroom. The authors advocated for applying SDT to how teachers meet the need for relatedness in the context of their relationships with students (Klassen et al., 2012). Engagement and relatedness in the classroom are essential for teachers, as engaged teachers are able to display self-determined behaviors and are more able to cope with "complex demands that arise within the course of their workday" (Klassen et al., 2012, p. 152). Teachers in high-poverty schools are more likely to experience workplace demands that may cause burnout and emotional exhaustion (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012). Many factors influence how veteran teachers perceive their needs and concerns as they relate to teaching in a high-poverty Title I school, but SDT was the underpinning of this study of veteran teacher attrition in a Title I school.

Veteran Teachers

Veteran teachers in high-poverty Title I schools have a wealth of experiences that impact and build upon how those teachers construct meaning about the different aspects

of their working environments. How veteran teachers perceive their environments has a direct impact on their responses to accountability measures, morale, and attrition (Rubin, 2011). Three areas of research in the literature guided this study on the needs and concerns, levels of school commitment, as well as the rate of attrition, of veteran teachers in high-poverty Title I schools: (a) teacher retention in LSES schools, (b) the perspectives of veteran teachers in LSES schools, and (c) the targeted support that may keep veteran teachers in LSES schools.

Review of the Literature

This section contains an analysis of the literature on studies of what teachers may perceive and experience in high-poverty schools. Although the studies were not solely focused on veteran teachers, the research reviewed here aids in understanding the needs and concerns that may arise for the veteran teachers who teach in high-poverty schools. The literature review contains studies on possible causes for attrition in high-poverty schools, including the effect that it has on the quality of student instruction for those students who most need effective teachers. Teacher perspectives are also discussed as they relate to how teachers in high-poverty schools perceive their effectiveness and relationships with students. Finally, I have reviewed studies that explained the targeted supports that may be implemented in order to keep veteran teachers in schools where instructional consistency and teacher effectiveness is paramount for the neediest students.

Saturation was reached in the literature review by including relevant, peer-reviewed articles from current research, which I defined as within the past 5 years. Articles were found in databases such as Education Research Complete, ERIC, Sage, and

Google Scholar. More articles were accessed and not used for the literature review, as findings from further studies began to be redundant. Search terms included *teacher attrition*, *low socioeconomic schools*, *teacher perceptions* and *high-poverty schools*, *urban educators,* and *veteran teachers*. Additionally, *teacher career stages*, *No Child Left Behind,* and terms related to qualitative research, such as *case study*, were used. Other search terms found in the literature included *self-determination theory*, *autonomous motivation, school commitment, teacher burnout, teacher plateauing, teacher resilience,* and *teacher-student relationships*. Conceptual references were also included when cited in other sources in order to provide background information, and seminal works such as studies completed by Ryan and Deci (2000) contributed to the explanation of the conceptual basis for the study.

Teacher Attrition in LSES Schools

LSES schools typically have a low-performing, mostly non-White student population that comes from a low socioeconomic background (Boyd et al., 2011). Teacher attrition can be high, and schools can be labeled "hard to staff" (Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2012, p. 4) for a variety of reasons. Issues that accompany students who live in poverty and overwhelming pressure on teachers to get their students to pass high-stakes standardized tests are just two of the challenges that teachers face in hard to staff schools (Johnson et al., 2012). Teacher attrition is highest in high-poverty, minority schools. For example, Boyd et al. (2011) discussed attrition rates in New York City schools in which 27% left the lowest-performing schools, as opposed to 15% in the highest-performing schools. Donaldson (2009) found that teachers did not choose to leave because of the

characteristics of their student populations; rather, “lack of community support” (p. 359) was cited as the overwhelming reason. Conversely, because of the desire to affect change for their students, effective teachers in LSES schools may leave teaching in order to have a broader influence on more students, whether in the context of policy change or school administration (Donaldson, 2009).

The revolving door of teachers entering and leaving high-poverty schools contributes to the spread of inexperienced or ineffective teachers (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). The focus should not only be on retaining teachers but on retaining quality teachers who have a positive effect on student achievement (Ronfeldt et al., 2011). Poor children and children of color are more likely to be in classrooms taught by inexperienced, ineffective, and out-of-field teachers. Closing the achievement gap means paying attention to this issue by enacting measures designed to encourage and retain effective teachers in hard to staff schools. Administrators can assist in this process and promote retention of the most effective teachers, induce teachers in low-poverty schools to move to high-poverty schools, and create an environment where all teachers can improve their skills (Desimone & Long, 2010).

Perspectives of Veteran Teachers in LSES Schools

Teachers who feel effective with their students are more likely to stay committed to their schools. Kraft et al. (2012) found that educators who stay in LSES schools recognize that change and academic achievement does not occur in isolation. Teachers in one segment of the Kraft et al. (2012) study were willing to work together and go beyond the four walls of their classrooms to meet the unique needs of their students. However,

teachers at the elementary level feel they are under greater pressure from NCLB and the resulting state-mandated assessments (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010). Because they tend to instruct the same students for most of the school day, elementary teachers feel a connectedness to their students that educators at other levels may not experience. As a result, elementary teachers have more ownership of test results and feel more responsible if those results are poor (Byrd-Blake et al., 2010), which could lead to teachers feeling ineffective in their instruction.

In addition to feeling effective, teachers who experience a good relationship with students are also more likely to stay in their schools (Veldman, van Tartwijk, Brekelmans, & Wubbels, 2013). Job satisfaction increases as teachers' perception of good teacher-student relationships increases (Veldman, et al., 2013). Difficulties with classroom management are directly related to teachers' negative perceptions of student relationships. Although difficulty with classroom management is a dominant reason for attrition in early career teachers, veteran teachers have also reported problems with classroom management as a predictor of burnout and loss of resilience later in their careers (Chang, 2009). According to Veldman et al. (2013), looking at teacher-student relationships may provide clues for policy makers who wish to keep veteran teachers in their schools.

Finally, good relationships with those who are training to enter the profession are essential as well. Veteran teachers often serve as mentors to those who are participating in field-based teacher education programs. Snow-Gerono (2009) found that the relationship between novice and veteran educators is enhanced when the voices of

veteran educators are heard when it comes to educational policy and reform efforts. Having their voices heard assists in providing the means for all veteran educators to feel valued and effective, as well as more likely to remain in the profession. (McCoy, Wilson-Jones, & Jones, 2013).

Targeted Support

It has been widely documented that novice teachers receive multiple forms of support during the first years of their career (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). However, once a teacher reaches "veteran" status, the support and mentoring they received as novices is ultimately given to the new teachers that are coming in behind them. Researchers have discussed ways to keep teachers in their schools by correcting organizational and environmental characteristics (Boyd et al., 2011; Cuddapah et al., 2011; Grissom, 2011; Johnson et al., 2012). However, support for veteran teachers' needs and concerns has been missing in most of the discussions. Plateauing (Meister & Ahrens, 2011), loss of morale, commitment, and resilience (Day & Gu, 2009), and feeling pressure to cover a lot of curriculum before giving the yearly standardized test (Barrett, 2009) can cause veteran teachers to experience feelings of burnout.

Burnout is most often characterized by repeated unpleasant emotions, exhaustion, cynicism, and feelings of being ineffective (Fernet et al., 2012). Burnout and loss of resilience can be a pressing issue for veteran teachers in high-poverty schools who must meet all of the academic and emotional needs of the students in their classrooms. According to Chang (2009), in order to successfully avoid or cope with burnout, teachers need targeted supports such as training in (a) dealing with emotions related to teacher-

student relationships, (b) reflecting on classroom events in a more detached manner by understanding why some students display difficult behavior, (c) "emotion-focused" and "task-focused" coping strategies (p. 214), and (d) facilitating effective classroom management. This kind of targeted support, according to Chang, can be effective in mitigating the effects of burnout.

In addition, targeted support for veteran teachers in high-poverty schools in the area of learning how to manage their emotions can be used to mitigate the effects of issues such as burnout and loss of resilience. In today's era of high-stakes testing, the demands on educators can be overwhelming. Researchers in one study found that practicing mindfulness, which is an individual's ability to identify stress triggers and emotions and to utilize coping strategies, is particularly effective (Abenavoli, Jennings, Greenburg, Harris, & Katz, 2013). Providing professional development in the area of developing mindfulness has been shown to be effective for veteran educators as a means to protect against burnout (Jennings, Snowberg, Coccia, & Greenburg, 2011).

Finding ways to mitigate these effects is becoming increasingly important for veteran educators in high-poverty schools, especially when dealing with problematic student behaviors or issues related to students who live in poverty. Ross, Romer, and Horner (2011) found that implementing strategies such as schoolwide positive behavior interventions and supports (SWPBIS) was more effective in preventing burnout and loss of resilience for teachers in high-poverty schools than for teachers in schools of higher socioeconomic status. Ross et al. (2011) stated that study results indicated "the well-being of teachers in schools of lower socioeconomic status may benefit the most from

SWPBIS implementation" (p. 125). According to Ross et al., SWPBIS allows teachers to feel more effective and better able to cope emotionally. Strategies such as SWPBIS allow teachers to understand the reasons behind student behavior and have a variety of tools to use for creating a classroom environment that is conducive to learning.

In addition to putting measures in place to guard against burnout, other tangible and nontangible benefits have been studied as they relate to supporting and retaining veteran teachers in Title I schools, including collegial relationships and support for teachers as they move through various career stages (Bray, 2011; Thorburn, 2011). Studies have also shown that although veteran teachers listed financial incentives as a reason to transfer to and stay in high-poverty schools, money was not a reason teachers left their schools (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012). Instead, according to the Petty et al. (2012) study, teachers stayed at their high-poverty schools because of good relationships with their students as well as a positive school environment and supportive administrators.

Implications

Based on this study's findings, I developed a project related to supporting and retaining veteran teachers in Title I schools. The project, explained in Section 3 and Appendix A, is a series of professional development activities for veteran teachers that are geared toward the needs and concerns that came to light during data collection. Shernoff et al. (2011) recommended professional development for teachers that provides "job-embedded, practice-relevant support in the areas in which teachers struggle" (p. 68). This includes, according to the authors, support that helps to alleviate stress by allowing

teachers to experience supportive, collegial relationships, as well as information on issues such as classroom management (Shernoff et al., 2011).

The professional learning activities in the project were designed to be guided by administrators who are concerned about fulfilling the district's 2012-2017 Strategic Plan components, which addressed fewer inexperienced teachers, reduced turnover in hard to staff schools, and increased retention of effective employees. Hughes (2012) found that helping school administrators recognize their "level of influence" as well as how to "[build] a positive working relationship with teachers and [empower] teachers" (p. 247) would help increase school commitment and lower attrition rates in their schools. Gu and Day (2013) had similar findings. In a study on teacher resilience, the authors found that the qualities of effective school administrators, including their awareness of strategies they could consistently use to support their teachers, were essential in keeping teachers engaged and committed to their schools (Gu & Day, 2013).

Summary

This section defined the problem of teacher attrition at both the local and national levels, as well as in the professional literature. It is well documented that one third of teachers new to the profession, for various reasons, leave within their first 3 years. During the first 3 years, most school districts have support programs in place for new teachers to help them navigate policies and procedures, curriculum, and classroom management, in addition to providing them with a teacher mentor. Teachers who make it past the 3-year mark often lose the benefit of that kind of intensive support. Once they have achieved veteran status, teachers are often left to their own devices as they juggle

increasing demands related to paperwork, student assessment, and the various roles teachers must fill for their students today. Teaching, especially at the elementary level, can be an isolated profession as each teacher goes into his or her own classroom, closes the door, and teaches the same students each day.

The increasing demands and the necessity for teachers to provide more for the needs of today's students can cause feelings of isolation, frustration, and feelings of burnout. Pressure to ensure academic success for every student who enters the classroom door has also increased in the wake of NCLB (2002). Teachers' needs may not be met in the context of their work environment as a result of the varied and cumulative stresses that teachers may face every day. Not having their needs met in the context of their work environment can be a predictor of levels of school commitment and veteran teacher attrition. Veteran teachers' levels of school commitment and attrition are not only a logistical and financial problem for school districts, but can also be a detriment for providing students with continuity of instruction. Increasing understanding of veteran teachers' needs and concerns, especially for those teachers who are in high-poverty Title I schools, is essential to reversing the tide of teachers who leave for a better work environment in order to get their needs met.

Section 2 includes a discussion of the research methodology that was used for the study. The discussion includes the methodological framework, the setting and sample, instrumentation, and sample questions from the interview protocol that were used. The section concludes with an explanation of the methods for data collection and analysis, the ethical considerations of the study, and a discussion of the results.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of the study was to increase understanding of veteran teachers' perspectives of their needs and concerns within the context of their work environment at a Title I school. A case study design was chosen for the study after other methodology designs were considered and rejected. For example, grounded theory is used to generate a theory that explains the experiences of individuals, while narrative research describes peoples' lives or tells their stories in narrative form (Creswell, 2012). Ethnographic designs are procedures for describing and analyzing a cultural group in their own setting over time (Creswell, 2012). These designs would contribute to the research base when studying veteran teachers in Title I schools, but a case study was the most appropriate design for this study, which employed interviews in order to understand their needs and concerns.

According to Yin (2003), a case study is appropriate when "you deliberately [want] to cover contextual conditions—believing they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study" (p.13). In order to include contextual conditions, the research design was a heuristic case study with semistructured interviews of Title I veteran teachers as the main form of data collection. A case study was appropriate for this type of research question because it "offers insights and illuminates meanings" and "bring[s] about understanding that …can affect and perhaps even improve practice" (Merriam, 2009, p. 51). A case study was also appropriate for this research because the phenomenon, which was the needs and concerns of veteran teachers as they relate to their

levels of school commitment and attrition rates, was being studied within the bounded system of one particular Title I school (Creswell, Hanson, Plano, & Morales, 2007; Creswell, 2012).

Research Design and Approach

This case study was designed to systematically collect data that revealed the needs and concerns of a select group of veteran teachers in a Title I school. Data were gathered from participants who were chosen using criterion-based sampling. Ten participants were chosen from a purposeful sample (Merriam, 2009) of teachers who had at least 6 years of classroom experience and were employed as homeroom teachers. The participants were invited to sit down with me for a one-on-one interview. The case study design with semistructured interviews as the primary form of data collection allowed me to probe further into the perspectives of each participant (Merriam, 2009). The small sample size ($N = 10$), according to Creswell (2012), allowed for richer, more in-depth answers to the open-ended questions that were developed to answer the research problem.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) recommended that qualitative researchers go into the research setting with no assumptions or preconceived notions about what they will find. As a former member of the learning community where this case study took place, I knew the culture, participants, and student population. The challenge for me as a researcher was to engage in the epoche process (Merriam, 2009) and to "bracket" my understanding of the phenomenon as it currently exists (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 25). Although I had my own set of needs and concerns as a Title I teacher, I was able to acknowledge them and set them aside in order to conduct the research with as little bias as possible.

Participants

For this study, I collected data from in-depth, semistructured interviews with a select group of Title I veteran teachers from one school. Veteran teachers were defined as those with 6 years or more of classroom experience "who, through years of practice, have the knowledge and ability to reflect on their work and speak to the complexity of teaching" (Meister, 2010, p. 887). The principal gave me a list of all of the homeroom teachers on staff who met the criteria of having 6 or more years of experience. All possible participants who met the criteria as homeroom veteran teachers received an invitation to participate via school e-mail. As an employee of the school system where the research site was located, I was able to utilize the district e-mail system from my Walden e-mail account to contact possible participants. The e-mail included information regarding the purpose of the study, expectations for the interviews, and participant protections. My contact information—phone number and e-mail address—was also in the invitation e-mail.

In order to fully explain the phenomenon, I was anticipating that at least 10 teachers would agree to participate in the study so that a large amount of data could be gathered. Six teachers initially agreed to participate, so I sent another e-mail about a week later to the homeroom teachers, who met the criteria of 6 years or more of experience and who had not previously responded, asking for participants and outlining the study and confidentiality safeguards. Snowball sampling is another technique that could have been used if I started interviews with initial participants and discovered that more participants

were needed for data collection (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), but that step was not necessary.

The sampling procedure was purposeful and criterion-based (Morrow, 2005) in that the participants were all from the same school and had specific criteria. Although various certified support personnel were employed within the school, homeroom teachers with 6 years or more of experience were the focus of the study. They were the veteran teachers on the "front line" as they navigated through the demands and expectations of educating their students. To be included in the study, participants had the following criteria (Santoro, 2011): (a) they taught in a high-poverty school, where more than 50% of the students qualified for FRPL, (b) they had taught for 6 years or more, and (c) they were currently categorized as "homeroom" teachers in that they were responsible for the same group of students for at least half of the school day. The interview process included recording demographic data of the participant sample.

Teacher Demographics

The homeroom teachers at the study site ranged in age from 23 to 64, with years of experience ranging between 0, or those who were beginning their first year, to one teacher who had 31 years of experience. Out of 54 homeroom teachers, most were female and Caucasian, although there were five African American female teachers, two Hispanic female teachers, and one Caucasian male teacher. The target school district, as required by NCLB, requires all of its teachers to be highly qualified, so 100% of the teachers employed at the study site were considered highly qualified according to degree and certification standards. The participants represented a range of elementary grade levels

and years of experience. Further demographic information, including gender and preparation route, was collected during each participant's interview.

Ethical Protection of Participants

The target school district's Research and Program Evaluation office allows for research to be conducted as long as the research contains minimal risk and is approved by the school principal. I received permission to conduct the study from the principal of the study site, and subsequently submitted the signed letter of cooperation with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application to Walden. Once IRB approval was granted, participants who responded affirmatively to the recruitment e-mail received a letter of invitation from me requesting written informed consent. A copy of the participant recruitment e-mail, letter, and consent form is on file with the IRB. The letter of invitation outlined the study procedures and participant rights and protections, as well as explained the potential benefits. The letter assured the participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and that their identities would remain completely confidential.

Confidentiality was maintained throughout the study by the use of generic descriptors and pseudonyms for each participant, the school, and the district. Individuals who agreed to participate were able to return their included consent form to me in a self-addressed, stamped envelope, and each participant was subsequently given a copy for their records. As further protection of confidentiality for participants, consent forms are kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. After transcribing the interview recordings, I secured the transcriptions and my interview notes in a locked filing cabinet

in my home office. Digital recordings of participant interviews are also kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home office. Any electronic data were backed up on an external hard drive on my personal computer that is password protected and will be destroyed after my degree has been conferred. These security measures will ensure that participant data remains confidential.

Although I knew all of the participants as former colleagues, participants were assured that participation was strictly voluntary and they could choose not to participate without fear of social repercussions. I did not hold any supervisory role over any of the potential participants. Participants were also guaranteed that they could choose not to respond to any questions they were not comfortable answering, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were informed that there was no compensation for participating in the study, but that potential benefits may come from the study results as the general understanding of their needs and concerns is increased. Participants were also informed that other benefits may occur as the results of the study will inform professional learning opportunities as well as policy development. Additionally, recommendations for supporting and retaining Title I veteran teachers were made to school and district administrators.

Data Collection

Data collection began after approval for the study was granted from Walden's IRB (approval #04-07-15-0339612). As part of the data collection process, 10 veteran teachers with 6 years or more of experience were considered for semistructured interviews. I asked the participants 12 to 14 open-ended questions and digitally recorded

their responses. The questions were focused on the veteran teachers' perceptions of their needs and concerns as they related to levels of school commitment and attrition. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted in a location that was convenient for the teacher, usually the teacher's classroom or a private office in the school. Meeting in a private, quiet location also contributed to the confidentiality of the participants. All interviews were conducted after school hours or during nonteaching time. Responses were transcribed and initially coded by me within 72 hours after each interview in order to capture the themes that were revealed (Merriam, 2009).

Instrumentation and Materials

Although a list of predetermined open-ended interview questions was the primary research instrument, I attempted to make the interviews more like a conversation between two people who have established a form of mutual trust, rather than a "question-and-answer session" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 39). According to Hatch (2002), "interviewers enter interview settings with questions in mind but generate questions during the interview in response to informants' responses, the social contexts…and the degree of rapport" (p. 23). Probing questions were also employed in the event that further information was needed or if I felt as though I would like the participant to elaborate on a response. I used a digital recorder to record the responses for transcription of the interviews so that I was not distracted by attempting to take notes of everything that was being said by each participant. I also made notes of anything I observed or wanted to remember from each interview, including any nonverbal or para-linguistic cues (Hycner,

1985). My role was that of an active listener, and I kept the interviews as focused as possible while allowing the participants to speak freely (Yin, 2003).

The interview questions (see Appendix C) were designed to capture teacher perceptions of the needs and concerns of veteran teachers employed in a Title I school. Questions were based in part on Meister's (2010) study on secondary teachers' perceptions of engagement and effectiveness and Korthagen's "onion model" (Zwart, Korthagen, & Attema-Noordewier, 2014; see Figure 1), which depicts the multiple layers that make up a person, including "environment, behavior, competencies, beliefs, identity, and personal mission" (p. 3). The onion model depicts a representation of the levels that I encouraged teachers to discuss in their interviews; namely, their environment, behavior, and competencies, as they relate to their perspectives as Title I veteran teachers.

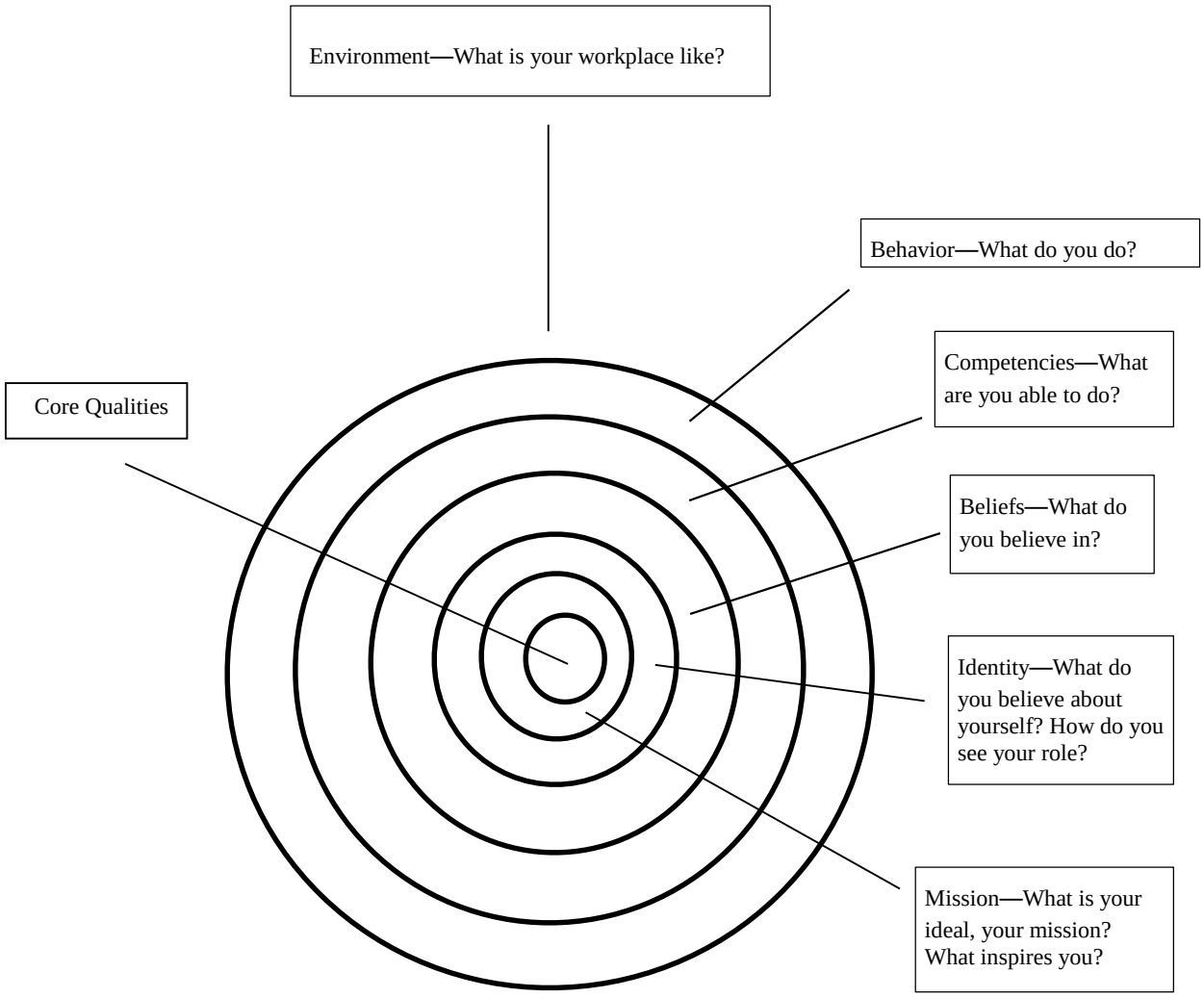

Figure 1. The onion model of levels of qualities and values within a person. Adapted from "A Strength-Based Approach to Teacher Professional Development", by R C. Zwart, F. A.J. Korthagen, and S. Attema-Noordewier, 2014, *Professional Development in Education*, p. 3. Copyright 2004 by Elsevier Limited. Reprinted with permission (see Appendix B).

Role of the Researcher

As a former member of the learning community of the study site, I was familiar with the population and setting where the study took place. I was not a homeroom teacher but served in a position that allowed me to instruct all of the students at least twice a month. Therefore, I knew all of the participants, had some idea of their backgrounds, and had established prior working relationships with them. I was a member of the leadership committee for several years and facilitated many professional development sessions for the teachers. I also oversaw most of the new technology integration over the years and instructed both students and teachers in how to integrate technology in the classroom. I was a very active member of the learning community both as an educator and as a teacher leader.

Because of these roles, I had the opportunity to interact with all staff members on a daily or weekly basis and built a relationship of trust and dependability. My former relationships at the study site contributed to the level of trust during data collection. The teachers knew me and felt comfortable speaking openly and honestly with me because I have such a longstanding relationship with the school. Although I was not a homeroom teacher, I instructed all of the students on a regular basis and experienced many needs and concerns of my own as a Title I veteran teacher. As stated earlier, I was able to engage in the epoche process and bracket my current understandings. I was aware of any biases I may have, but I approached data collection without any preconceived notions about what might emerge in the data. This process was made easier as I transferred to a new site for

the 2014-2015 school year. Therefore, I was not involved with the study site on a daily basis.

Data Analysis

During the analysis of the interview transcripts, I focused on making sense of the data and answering the research questions (Merriam, 2009). I used an inductive process as I put together a picture (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) that described the perceptions of the Title I veteran teachers regarding their needs and concerns. I transcribed each interview recording within 72 hours of meeting with each participant. Many qualitative researchers agree that the first step in analyzing the data is for the researcher to perform an initial reading of the text (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Hatch, 2002; Merriam, 2009). I read the transcripts and color-coded the data to begin establishing themes that could be used to answer the research questions (Merriam, 2009). I also used my reflective journal (see Appendix D) as I was completing the interviews to record my thoughts and ideas as well as patterns that emerged during initial analysis. A reflective journal is useful for a qualitative researcher in that it provides a means for recording and organizing data and beginning to formulate rich, thick descriptions of patterns and themes (Merriam, 2009).

Categories

Merriam (2009) noted that highlighting pieces of relevant data, or open coding, is an initial step in data analysis. As I conducted and transcribed more interviews, I developed a color-coding system to make note of where repeated words and phrases occurred in the data. All of the data was categorized according to how it provided

answers for the research questions, and categories were mutually exclusive (Merriam, 2009). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), developing a list of "coding categories" as the data is collected is essential for sorting the data (p.173). Coding categories included setting or context codes, situation codes, and subjects' perspectives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). I also noted specific quotes that supported the coding categories (Creswell, 2012). I reduced the initial number of codes as those that were redundant or overlapping were combined (Creswell, 2012). The process became more deductive as "some categories remain[ed] solid, and others [did] not hold up" (Merriam, 2009, p. 183). Finally, codes were used to establish five common categories (Creswell, 2012).

I identified emerging categories in the data as time, targeted support, level of commitment, student characteristics, and teacher characteristics. The color-coding system that I developed was used to sort the data into each category. According to Merriam (2009), linking categories with emerging subcategories provides the researcher with a greater understanding of the patterns in the data. I continued to use a deductive means of analyzing the data (Hatch, 2002). I was able to identify that the subcategories of uninterrupted planning (UP), meeting with colleagues (MC), and time to teach (TT) were part of the category of time (T). The category of targeted support (TS) contained the subcategories of financial compensation (FC), administrative support (AS), district support (DS), parent support (PS), and professional development (PD). I divided the category of level of commitment (LC) into stayers (S) and leavers (L). Social issues (SI), behavioral issues (BI), and academic issues (AI) became subcategories for student

characteristics (SC). Teacher characteristics (TC) contained the subcategories of student relationships (SR) and teacher qualities (TQ).

Discrepant Cases

Following Morrow's (2005) recommendation, I assured adequate data collection and analysis by searching for "disconfirming evidence" and "discrepant case analysis" (p. 256). Searching for disconfirming evidence allowed me to perform comparisons with confirming evidence to understand fully the phenomenon under investigation. Discrepant cases also allowed me to revise any key themes or patterns that emerged in the data, which then become a more accurate reflection of the participants' perceptions (Morrow 2005; Hatch, 2002).

Reliability, Trustworthiness, and Validity

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), qualitative researchers define reliability as "a fit between what they record as data and what actually occurs in the setting under study" (p. 40). From the beginning of the study, I ensured reliability and trustworthiness by bracketing my experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and engaging in the epoche process (Merriam, 2009). I increased reliability and trustworthiness through the use of member checks with participants (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) recommended that the researcher "[take] the findings back to the participants" so that they can verify the accuracy of the report (p. 259). After transcribing and summarizing each interview, I sent a summary to each participant and asked each person to comment on aspects of their results, such as the accuracy of the descriptions and the resulting themes.

I also used a peer debriefer (Creswell, 2012), who conducted a peer review of the results. Peer review provides internal validity because it asks others to read and comment on or question the data, thereby clarifying the results (Merriam, 2009). The peer debriefer that I used is a colleague, also a veteran teacher, who does not work at the study site. This individual has an earned doctorate in curriculum, instruction, and assessment and is qualified to review the results of this study. The peer debriefer was not given any identifying information regarding the study site or the participants but received my interpretation of the findings. The individual signed a confidentiality agreement before our first meeting. We met a total of five times and worked for about 10 hours to analyze the data. I asked questions of the debriefer, such as those listed in Creswell (2012), regarding whether or not the findings were grounded in the data as well as the degree of researcher bias.

Finally, I hoped to achieve a measure of external validity through the use of rich, thick descriptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) while explaining the findings from the study. External validity, or transferability, is the term preferred by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for qualitative research. Transferability includes writing about the findings with enough detail to allow the reader to evaluate the extent to which the findings are generalizable to other settings or situations. Although this study took place with a sample of teachers in one Title I school, the findings may be useful for others in similar circumstances.

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the perspectives of Title I veteran teachers regarding their needs and concerns. Understanding the teachers' needs

and concerns can contribute to greater school commitment, a lower attrition rate, and more continuity of instruction for students. For this study, I interviewed a sample of Title I veteran teachers to ascertain what they feel their needs and concerns are in this era of high-stakes accountability and increasing responsibilities. The problem prompting the study was that as part of their 2012-2017 strategic plan, a large, urban school district in a Southeastern state would like to have "fewer inexperienced teachers in hard-to-staff subjects and schools; reduced turnover in hard-to-staff schools, [and] increased retention of effective employees". The study site had a double digit attrition rate of teachers for the past four school years, which speaks to the need for "reduced turnover in hard-to-staff schools". The study site was a Title I school with a FRPL rate of over 80%, and the majority of its students came from homes where poverty was prevalent and the need for strong, consistent instruction was paramount.

The objective of this study was to increase understanding of the Title I veteran teachers' perceptions of the various aspects of their working environment as they relate to SDT, proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000). The study was guided by one central research question: From the veteran teachers' perspective, how can the district support and retain veteran educators in the target school in order to increase their levels of school commitment?

Specifically,

1. How do a group of veteran teachers at the target school describe their needs and concerns?

2. What are the perceptions of Title I veteran teachers about their working conditions--including level of resources, mentoring and support, and working with students and families who have a wide range of needs?
3. According to the veteran teachers, what are the targeted supports that could be implemented in order to improve their school commitment and reduce the attrition rate at this Title I school?

The analysis of the findings from the study indicated the need for a series of professional development sessions for teachers and administrators, which included understanding students who live in poverty, educating ESOL students, increasing parent involvement, and dealing with student behavior issues. The next section contains rich, thick descriptions of the findings from the teacher interviews, according to the categories that resulted from the data analysis. The section will begin with the demographic information of the teachers, which will help to place the findings in context.

Teacher Interviews

During the spring of 2015, I interviewed 10 Title I veteran teachers who met the criteria of being homeroom teachers who had been teaching for at least 6 years and were currently teaching at the high-poverty school study site. The participants represented a range of elementary grade levels and years of experience. Further demographic information, including gender and years at the study site, was collected during each participant's interview (see Table 1). As noted in Table 1 below, only one participant received a master's degree in education before becoming a teacher. The other nine participants received bachelor's degrees in education before teaching.

Table 1

Teacher Demographics

Pseudonym	Years of Experience	Years at the Study Site	Gender	Preparation
Participant A	22	7	Female	4-year college
Participant B	10	3	Female	4-year college
Participant C	28	14	Female	4-year college
Participant D	8	5	Female	4-year college
Participant E	7	7	Female	4-year college
Participant F	20	12	Female	4-year college
Participant G	10	7	Female	4-year college
Participant H	17	14	Female	4-year college
Participant I	20	16	Female	4-year college
Participant J	13	3	Female	master's degree

I used an interview protocol when meeting with each participant (see Appendix C), which contained interview questions and probes that could be used if needed. The interviews were utilized as a means to allow the participants to share their perspectives regarding their needs and concerns as Title I veteran teachers. I met with each participant individually for approximately 45-60 minutes, recorded the interviews with their permission, and then transcribed the interviews within 48-72 hours. Each participant received a summary of their interview so they could make comments or corrections if

necessary. After analyzing and color coding each transcript, five main categories emerged from the data (see Table 2).

Table 2

Categories and Subcategories Revealed in the Data

Time (T)	**Student Characteristics (SC)**
Uninterrupted Planning (UP)	Social Issues (SI)
Meeting with Colleagues (MC)	Behavioral Issues (BI)
Time to Teach (TT)	Academic Issues (AI)
Targeted Support (TS)	**Teacher Characteristics (TC)**
Financial Compensation (FC)	Student Relationships (SR)
Administrative Support (AS)	Follow up
District Support (DS)	High expectations
Parent Support (PS)	Love/care for students
Professional Development (PD)	
Relevant	**Teacher Qualities (TQ)**
Job-embedded	Make a difference
Learning from Colleagues	"Not about the money"
	Advocate
Level of Commitment (LC)	Lifelong learners
"Stayers"	Loyal/committed
"Leavers"	

Note. Categories in bold represent the main themes revealed in the data.

Each participant answered every interview question. Probes were utilized in a few of the interviews, but most of the participants seemed to be open and forthcoming in answering the questions. The five main categories and the resulting subcategories served to provide answers to the research questions regarding the teachers' perspectives on how the district can support and retain educators at the study site, which was the Title I school where they were currently teaching. The environment of the study site was a complex

one, described by Participant J as "a very large onion with many, many layers…in a school like this, there are so many complexities that are not reported statistically or in educational research. [This includes] the social aspects, the families, the socioeconomics of just the daily life--never mind how they affect academics." The answers to the interview questions gave some insight into what makes up the many layers, according to the veteran teachers. Rich, thick descriptions follow to explain each of the categories and the evidence provided from the interviews.

Research Question 1

Time. Time emerged as a category of concern to the veteran teachers. The participants discussed having uninterrupted planning time, the ability to meet with colleagues, both on their own grade levels and in vertical teams, and having time to teach lessons without having to stop for testing or to deal with other non-academic issues. The participants related their perspectives in this way:

> *Participant A*: "I would like more time to plan with my team. We plan together, but it's always rushed. We need more time to plan….I think we just need time to talk to other adults."
>
> *Participant C*: "I have no scheduled planning period and that makes it extremely difficult. Technically, I'm supposed to have a 30-minute lunch and I have a 50-mimute lunch, so that 20 minutes could be considered my planning period, but that's truly not enough time to do what needs to be done. One of the things I've resorted to this year and I'm not necessarily proud of it, but I actually called in

> sick one day…to stay home and do bubble sheets because I have no planning period and I just don't have the time."
>
> *Participant G*: "I've talked to friends who have transferred to non-Title I schools and I've just heard that you do a lot more teaching….I mean it's just the amount of support where you don't feel like you're doing everything."
>
> *Participant I*: "I want undisturbed teacher workdays. I'd like to have built into our year some training that didn't require us to stay after school or [have] our planning time taken up. We need to have planning time sacred and have the training, yes, but not take our planning time to do that."
>
> *Participant J*: "Our children are so disproportionately tested versus their upper- to middle-class peers. Knowing they actually need more instructional time can be daunting at times."

When asked why she felt the students were being tested so much more than students in more affluent schools, Participant J responded, "More data is required; there's more accountability. There's more money coming from the government [as a Title I school]." This results in more teaching time being taken up with testing, and more planning time being taken up with data analysis. Participant A agreed: "The amount of work can be a negative experience. There is so much data to keep track of and so many assessments that sometimes I feel like that is all I do."

Although participants wanted time to meet with their colleagues, one participant felt that the administration held too many meetings. Participant E stated, "I think my time isn't spent wisely, not on my part, but on what I'm asked to do. Yeah, I feel really

stretched and I feel really exhausted, and it's not a valuable use of my time. At least once a week we have meetings that are completely irrelevant."

However, one participant commented on how she felt the administration this year did not hold meetings unless absolutely necessary. Participant D responded, "This year I feel like admin has done a fabulous job of not meeting when we don't have to. Our grade chair this year--same thing. If we don't have to meet, if she has nothing to say, if it's something that can be done over e-mail, that's how it's done. Same with our faculty meetings. We have them when we need them. I really don't feel like I'm sitting in meetings all the time."

Finally, Participants C, E, and I discussed how class time is often used to deal with non-academic issues:

> *Participant C*: "I think academically I can meet their needs, but they have so many needs that as a teacher you want to be able to address it all, you want to be able to help them figure and sort it all out and there's no way. I know that…if there's an issue whether it's a behavior issue or a social issue or whatever, I'm going to take class time to help the children sort through that. I could really do that each and every day and I'd get nothing taught and there have to be times where I just say I've got to let that one go."
>
> *Participant E*: "I want them [the students] to feel important. I want to listen to everything they have to say. I do really try to use our counselors, because at least that time can be spent by me with my other students, and they can be having the

problem addressed. Sometimes it doesn't lend itself to that. I've taken time during my reading groups to sit and talk with them about whatever's going on."

Participant I: "I spend all of Monday mornings checking in with the kids to get them ready and it takes that decompression time for those kids to calm down. They come in my room basically wild-eyed sometimes because they have lived through hell over the weekend. Then they come in and then it's like all of a sudden, you feel the whole classroom take a deep breath and let it go and then we get on with learning. It's like, 'huh, okay, let's go. I can read now.' "

Participants A and H agreed to some extent. Participant A stated, "I just wish I had more time to spend with each child individually, but sometimes that's just not possible. I wish I could give them more." Participant H said, "I would love to be more open with them and listen more to them than having to be like, 'We've got to do science now. Okay, we've got to go do this now.' Sometimes I feel like I don't listen to them as much as I wish I could because they have so many stories they want to tell, and you just don't have time during the day."

Teacher characteristics. Although each of the participants had various years of experience and taught at grade levels from kindergarten through 5th, they shared some common characteristics that revealed more of their needs and concerns as Title I veteran teachers. I divided the teacher characteristics into student relationships and teacher qualities.

Student relationships. The data revealed that the teachers had good relationships with their students, or at least were concerned about establishing and maintaining good

relationships. A pattern among the interview responses was love, care, and concern for their students, as well as feeling the need to protect them during and beyond the students' school day, yet instill a sense of independence in them.

> *Participant A*: "I feel like my relationship is good with my kids. I feel like my classroom is well run and the kids know what to expect from me and their daily routine. A lot of them want to do well and seem to want to please [their teacher]."
>
> *Participant B*: "Once these kids come into my classroom on the first day, they're 'my kids'. We spend sometimes six, seven hours of the day together for 180 days and we become like a little family. I'm the head of the family, of course, but we all work together and we are all responsible for each other. I get to know them as individuals and as people, not just another piece of data that I have to track."
>
> *Participant D*: "I ask them questions, how they're doing. I feel like something else with a Title I school that we have to be more aware of is the abuse and the neglect [of students at home]. I feel like we have to be more in tune with that and really knowing our students because if they're off a little bit a certain day or if they're hiding something or getting upset more easily…it's our job to ask the appropriate questions to really find out what's going on. I feel like the teachers at this school do a really good job with that."
>
> *Participant E*: "I love them [her students] like they're my children. I'm protective of them like they're my own….I want them to feel comfortable with me. I want them to be able to come to me with a problem, and we can talk it out. I do the best I can. I want my kids to learn. I don't really care about what everybody else is

saying or doing, to an extent. I don't care what [the superintendent] or whoever else is next says. My students are important to me."

Participant F: "My students are respectful and open to learning. They trust what I tell them, and most know they can come to me if they have problems. We are able to laugh at and with each other."

Participant G: "I try to get close to them. I try to get to know them as a kid and not just a student and the data. I have a soft spot for the 'bad' kids. I try to really get in the kids' heads and figure out when they're acting up what is really wrong. I do really try to get to know them as real kids."

Participant H: "I am a very open teacher, and I get to know my students. I wish I could do more with them, like on the weekends. Go to a baseball game, or see them in a dance recital, but, unfortunately, I do have my own children, so that takes away."

Participant J: "My relationships with my students are the…thing I probably love the most. I value character education, a familial environment, independence. My responsibility is to get them away from me, not in a bad way but 'you can do it', because nobody has ever done that for them."

As part of loving and caring for their students, participants expressed having high expectations for them and following up with them long after they have left the teacher's classroom.

Participant C: "Usually when I see a former student the first thing I say is, 'What are your grades like? Specifically, what is your math grade like?' I constantly say

to my children, ‘When you graduate from high school I want to be invited to your graduation.’ I instill that in them now and I’m constantly asking them, ‘Are you going to graduate?’ ”

Participant D: “They are really trying to change the climate here that just because they’re EL [English Learner] students doesn’t mean they can’t do it [the work]. We’re raising expectations and not using the language barrier as a crutch.”

Participant G: “Yesterday afternoon I had a tenth grader come back and visit me, just because she wanted to say hi, and hung out for half an hour. It is just so great to be able to follow through and see them. That’s one part that I think keeps me grounded here is I’m attached. I like that they can come back and visit and check in and that kind of thing.”

Participant J: “I teach them to be independent. I teach them to problem solve. These kids come in and critical thinking is the most foreign of languages that they could possibly understand. [They say] ‘I broke my pencil’. [I say] ‘Great, now what’s the solution?’ The first few months, it’s always about, ‘How can you fix that?’ They learn how to have conversations in here. They learn how to use a proper tone of voice to solve a problem. The only way to make them understand that they’re responsible is to make them responsible.”

Teacher qualities. Having high expectations and following up with their students are part of the teachers’ relationships with their students, but they also spoke to the teacher qualities that were revealed during data collection. Qualities included being lifelong learners, the need to make a difference for their students, which included

advocating for them whenever possible and remaining loyal and committed to their students. Teachers also discussed how they did not get into teaching for the money, in fact, it's not "all about the money," but after the past few years of major budget cuts and no raises, money was beginning to be an issue. Financial compensation will be discussed in a later section as it relates to targeted support.

Being loyal and committed to their students and advocating for them whenever possible was also mentioned by participants in their interview responses:

> *Participant A*: "I feel pretty loyal to the school. I'm proud of our successes and feel defensive whenever anyone says anything bad about it [the school] or our kids. Sometimes, I feel like the district doesn't care what happens here, like we're just the 'Hispanic school' and we are in our own little bubble surrounded on all sides by more affluent schools with better test scores. I love these kids and I know that what I'm doing will make a difference someday."
>
> *Participant C*: "I think people who come here are here because they truly want to make a difference. They want to teach the children who nobody else wants to teach. They want to have the ability to have the impact of, 'If I don't help them get it, they're not going to get it.' One hundred percent of my heart is here."
>
> *Participant E*: "To me, it feels like they're [the district] treating children like a business, and they're children! I would assume…it's easier to be at another school in certain ways, but it's not right either way."

> *Participant I*: "I'm sure there are excellent teachers everywhere, but you will never find teachers who are more committed and passionate about their students than you would find here."
>
> *Participant J*: "I would personally like it if the administration made everybody aware of the current ESOL research. I really feel passionately that if the administration would make everybody aware of that and demand it, the students here would do a lot better. We need rudimentary training on whole language and understanding on how ELLs (English Language Learners) learn. We need to also remember that our entire population is not ESOL…that's all we talk about around here."

Participant F summed up her feelings on being committed to and advocating for her students. "I'm here for the long haul. I know other schools or people talk about our kids, but they need to be taught and I prefer working with this population of students. There are many struggles and frustrations along the way, but it can be rewarding."

The rewards most participants spoke about were not monetary. Participant D said, "Just watching the kids' 'light bulbs' go off when they've mastered a task that they've been having difficulty with and the understanding they finally get when they have mastered the skill..." Participant G agreed, "I enjoy teaching. I enjoy seeing a little spark when they get it." When asked about the rewards she experienced, if any, Participant H said, "I guess really just seeing the growth. I've actually seen some students really blossom. They get really excited when they start figuring it out. That is just so exciting to see on a little kid's face."

Many participants believed that a quality that helps them remain committed and enjoying the rewards of student learning is being life-long learners themselves:

> *Participant A*: "Even though the district is doing away with paying people more for each degree they get, and I understand if people can't afford to get another degree without getting compensated for it, I still think it's necessary to continue to learn and refine your practice. We can learn from each other, from current research, online webinars, conferences, workshops, the list is endless. We should always take advantage of anything that is offered because education is not a stagnant field."
>
> *Participant B*: "I think I have a pretty good repertoire of skills in the classroom, but what works for one class one year is not necessarily going to work the next year. I have to constantly grow and change. Sometimes I almost have to reinvent myself but I do it if that's what works for my kids."
>
> *Participant C*: "I'm constantly trying to learn and grow. I'm not going to throw away everything that I know is effective for the new thing that's coming down the pike, but if something comes down…that works I'm going to use it."
>
> *Participant G*: "I watch tons of webinars for ideas, follow several people on Twitter for teaching ideas, but …for the most part personally I seek out [learning opportunities]."

Research Question 2

Student characteristics. The student population at the study site was racially diverse, with Hispanic students in the majority (70%). African American students

comprised 20% of the population, 8% of students were Caucasian, and multi-racial students made up the last 2%. Over 80% of the target school's students qualified for FRPL. Participant A described some of the assistance the school receives from the surrounding community: "There is a lot of poverty, but we also have a lot of help. The Rotary Club donated dictionaries to the entire 3rd grade. We have a grant this year to provide fresh fruit to the kids three times a week for a snack. Another organization donates backpacks and school supplies. We don't have a lot of parent involvement, but we do have a lot of community involvement." However, Participant D wondered if it's all "too much". She stated, "I feel like sometimes we have too much…I don't want to say that the kids aren't appreciative of it, but when they get, get, get, it's not as exciting. I don't want to make it sound like they're not appreciative, but we do get those few kids [who] have been here for a while and they just have their hands out." In addition, the school received Title I funding from the federal government, which is provided to schools that have a FRPL rate of 40% or more.

Despite the financial and community support, students still dealt with many other issues. The participants' responses for this question were divided into subcategories of social issues, behavioral issues, and academic issues. When discussing some of the issues, Participant C said, "I think in surrounding schools …that are primarily white and not necessarily affluent, but not at the poverty level, these issues don't come up and I know they have their other issues or whatever, but these are some big issues that you want to help kids sort through and get a better understanding."

Social issues. Social issues described by the participants included school characteristics, whether students and families value education, and the prevalence of poverty:

> *Participant A*: "This is a tough job; some of the kids have a lot of challenges to overcome and you have to be teacher, mom, cop, nurse, counselor, all in one day sometimes."
>
> *Participant C*: "Here I feel almost half my job is convincing them [the students] that their education is valuable. Our parents, they're overwhelmed and they're busy trying to earn the money that they need to pay the rent and to pay the bills. Basically, they're thinking, 'If my kid's not in jail I'm doing okay.' I have a little boy in 5th grade and I don't know if he will graduate [high school] because…when he gets to the point where he can get odd jobs doing this or that his education is going to take a backseat to earning a paycheck."
>
> *Participant G*: "I've noticed something funny lately—some of the same kids who aren't finishing their homework are all going to soccer practice and baseball practice. I feel like sometimes that's almost more important to some of the families than the math practice."
>
> *Participant H*: "I do believe this is a really good school. I think it might get a bad rap from the rest of the community, because it's just a small little pocket [of poverty] in a very affluent area, but for the majority of the kids who are here, they want to be here. Their parents want to make a better life for themselves, but we do

have a lot of transients, and that, also, does make it a little difficult…other schools probably don't have as much of [a transient population]."

Behavioral issues. Student behavioral issues were also a concern to some of the participants. Some dealt with more issues than others, and some had different perspectives on the severity of the school's behavioral issues, but student behavior was discussed frequently in the interviews. Participant A stated, "I would like some help dealing with extreme behavior issues. When I first started teaching, inclusion wasn't as popular as it is now. Until I came here, I never had kids who got so angry that they would throw a chair or just walk out of the room. Sometimes I feel inadequate to deal with that." Other participants agreed:

Participant B: "The behavior of some of the children, now, mind you, it's only a small handful, was something I had to get used to when I first got here. I believe a lot of it is due to the kids often raising themselves because mom and dad are in survival mode. Those kids are not used to being told what to do by an adult."

Participant D: "We do have our behavior kids and those are rather difficult to deal with. I don't know if there's a correlation between [being] a Title I and [having] behavior children. However, I did not have anything like that at my old school."

Participant H: "I've dealt with some major behavior issues in my classroom [this year], extreme cases where kids had to leave the classroom. The students have been scared. That's been really negative this year. I feel like my kids have not gotten a hundred percent from me because I've been dealing with the behavior

> issue. Because of the one behavior issue, it's gotten to the point where I don't want to be here."
>
> *Participant J*: "We have a kid who started four weeks ago who is very violent. He's been suspended I think 5-6 times already. He's in one of the kindergarten classrooms. This teacher has bruises and she has to deal with it. I dread hearing stories from my colleagues about these kids who are out of control. I haven't had [this extreme] but my back was pulled trying to keep a student from trying to shove a table into another student."

According to most of the participants, behavior issues were dealt with at the school, but not enough was done. Participant J explained, "It's the abyss of the kid needs to be in school and the administration knows what's going on but the administration won't put that foot down where I've seen it happen in other schools--that parent is told they're going to have to get help, and they're going to get it now." She went on to explain, "We don't want to get in trouble because some schools got in trouble because of the way they report behaviors and [other] things."

Academic issues. Academic issues were consistently discussed in the interview responses. The participants mentioned concerns such as students having no background knowledge, being second language learners, not having enough home support, and inappropriate curriculum being taught to ESOL students:

> *Participant D*: "They go home over the summer for two months. They get no English, no reading, or for our English speakers they're in apartments or situations that they aren't as structured as maybe they were during the school

year. We have a lot of students where English is not their first language, so that puts an added burden when trying to make test scores and teach day to day lessons."

Participant E: "I have a student I'm about to send to [the next] grade, who's beginning a first grade reading level, and has never passed a comprehension test. I don't have a choice, because he's already been tested for Special Ed. and he passed the test. He's already been retained once, so my only option is to send him on, and they're going to be [mad] about it. [The next grade], they're going to come to me and say, 'What are you doing?' But I had to do it. My hands were tied."

Participant G: "I'm sure it's not isolated to a Title I [school], but I feel like it's a very common problem at a Title I is the…huge amount of children that are working below grade level at our school. I'm sure a large piece of that is the language barrier; they are learning English. We're trying to build in background knowledge for many, many years, school years and pre-early childhood years where they just didn't have the language experience. They didn't have the life experiences to build some of this background knowledge."

Participant J: "The way ESOL is taught here is ridiculous, it goes against every grain of the ESOL research that's out there and what's effective. ELLs don't generally learn through phonics. That is what almost every ESOL teacher does here—phonics. We're not meeting the needs of our students. We're testing them. We are setting the bar without understanding how to get there."

According to Participant I, blame for academic issues always falls on the teacher. She stated, “If somehow there’s not performance, it’s not because the child lives in poverty or comes to me not having eaten or having stayed up all night because there was violence in the home or because they were thrown out of their house or because of all these other reasons, it’s me that did not do their job.” Participant J agreed, “The RTI [Response to Intervention] process says, ‘Sorry, we don’t trust you’. In this school, it’s a 100 times harder…it’s too much to prove. You feel like a failure every time you go to these meetings and it’s just, ‘oh, no, we’ve got to do this [first].’ You want these kids identified? You want interventions? Either make time for it during the day and say that’s protected time or get us somebody or both.”

Research Question 3

In this section, I describe the participants’ responses regarding what they consider to be targeted supports that would help them do their jobs more effectively and provide more continuity of instruction for their students. Although some talked about what they felt was already in place in terms of support, others talked about what they wished could be implemented to provide further support.

Targeted support. Targeted support subcategories included financial support, administrative and district support, parent support, and professional development.

Financial compensation. Although this particular district was able to do away with the furlough days that were utilized in surrounding districts in order to save money during the lean budget years that began during the past decade, staff raises were few and far between. Participant I stated, “I think money is always a ‘kicker’ for making you feel

valued. I think that is a big one because for the last seven or eight years, I have not particularly felt respected by…the system or the profession or whoever the overall people [are] that sit up there at the top. That's evident through their willingness to compensate us for what we do." Other participants, when asked about financial compensation as a targeted support, said,

> *Participant C*: "Just recently the board approved new pay increases. Again the teachers with the most experience are given a lower percentage of an increase in our pay. We are getting a 4% increase and teachers with fewer years of experience are getting 8%. It's not all about the money…but I think it should be equitable. I feel it as a slap across the face."
>
> *Participant D*: "We've gotten one raise since I began teaching. I think it's [the raises] definitely going to help morale especially for people like me who haven't had this before. [But] I don't think the compensation they're giving us is making up. It's not the same that it should have been from the beginning."
>
> *Participant E*: "I didn't get into teaching for the money, but [when] you're stressed for time, you're emotionally stressed because of your job and what it entails, but then you're also financially stressed. Those are three pretty heavy burdens to carry all at the same time."

However, Participant G said, "I found out that in the county that I live in I would be making about five to six thousand dollars more a year. Yeah, more money would be nice, but luckily I'm married to a man who has a decent paying job so that allows me to do this without being as stressed about the money." She went on to say, "I like my job. I like

who I work with. I like my kids. I like what I do, so I guess the other side of the money argument is I knew what I was getting into when I got a teaching degree."

Administrative support. The principal and one out of the two assistant principals were new leaders at the study site during the school year when the study took place. Overall, the responses from the participants were positive about the amount of support they receive from the school administration, and most made note of the importance of having and retaining that support. Participant C stated, "The administration change helped a lot." Other participants agreed:

> *Participant B*: "When she's [the principal] here, she's here and visible. It's so important for the students to see her out and about, paying attention to what's going on in the school."
>
> *Participant D*: "The support from the administration has been really, really nice. I love our principal. She's extremely supportive. I feel like with the administration we have I know the door is open and if I have a concern I can easily go voice my opinion and she will do her best to work it in. I'm not saying she's going to agree…but she will do what she needs to either explain to me why it's this way or get me support to help me understand why things are the way they are."
>
> *Participant E*: "In a way, I feel supported. I had a student with some behavior issues. Did I feel support in that situation? Yeah, I really did. That's not always been the case."
>
> *Participant G*: "I feel like…a little bit has shifted in some of the attitudes, maybe some better behavior support or more follow through."

Participant H: "My colleagues definitely support me, and that's one of the reasons I'm still here. We have a new principal this year, and I feel like she is a lot more supportive of me as a teacher and with some of my issues going on in the classroom, but I think she really trusts what I have to say, which makes me feel good."

However, Participant E went on to say in a later comment about other kinds of administrative support: "I think that once you're out of the classroom, you forget really quickly what it's like…when you choose to have a meeting in the middle of the day, or at the end of the day, to tell me something else that I need to be doing after I've given you everything I have, you don't understand anymore what it's like. I don't think that my administration is trying to do me wrong. They just don't remember. I get that they have completely different pressures on them…so it comes down on us."

District support. Some of the pressures that school administrators were under came from district mandates. Participants were not as positive about the level of support they felt they received from the district. Participant F stated, "In the past few years, I have seen very little support offered to teachers. Since the new thing is to see 'school' as a 'business', it appears that parents come first and teachers are just minions." Veteran teachers also felt like the district did not value their expertise in knowing what is best for students:

Participant B: "The district? They just don't get it. They don't know what it's like to be in a classroom on a daily basis. We have this new teacher evaluation system that is almost impossible to keep up with. I spend more time dealing with that and

> I feel like I'm not doing enough with my students. And next year our evaluations are going to be tied to test scores? Really?"
>
> *Participant C*: "Our current superintendent made a comment that the best work of a teacher happens in their first 10 years and not after that. [Then] the head of the talent division [human resources] came here and basically compared us to a rundown vehicle and insinuated that we just need to be…taken to the junkyard and replaced with the newest model."
>
> *Participant I*: "The thing is you get so disillusioned. You keep thinking, 'Okay, the next administrator or the next superintendent…everybody's got their magic pill. Everybody stays long enough for their data to show but they don't stay long enough to see if it endures."

Parent support. Parent support was another common theme among participant responses. This category came in as a close second behind administrative support. Participant B said, "Parent support? What's that?" Only Participant D stated that she felt like she had an appropriate amount of parent support. She stated, "My parents are extremely supportive of what's going on in the classroom." She also stated, however, "I think my realistic desire that I would want for our parents is just to work with their children at home. I don't need help in the classroom. Even if they're just reading to them in Spanish or counting with them or just talking to the kids and not putting them in front of the TV or tablet." Other participants echoed her sentiments:

> *Participant G*: "When you have an academic issue, getting the parents to follow through on an academic plan at home as far as support I would say is another

negative. We're not only teaching tough content, but we're trying to teach it and everything to build up to it sometimes. Then as far as follow-through on studying or homework a lot of times I feel like we don't get support in getting that done."

Participant H: "I think if you have parents supporting you…the things you could do in the classroom would just be unbelievable. I feel like if you could get them in the classroom, they could understand what needs to be done at home. I don't think the parents understand how important the education is, and I think if they saw it in the classroom….They come for the fun stuff. I know that it can get tricky, too, having parents in your classroom at all times, but it would be something I would definitely appreciate."

Participant I: "When you hear of the parent support [in other schools] and you hear that there are PTAs that do work and you hear about foundations that are supported and…you think, 'Ah! I want that.' What would it be like to mention in a parent communication that you would like to do a book writing with each of the kids and have the parents come and do it with them, what would that be like?"

However, Participant I also stated, "I think [the parents are] very respectful of you and your position but in terms of being supportive in a way that helps facilitate what the learning objectives are for their child, some of the cultures…think it's disrespectful to jump in there and try to do something. On the other hand, the view is they're not being supportive." Participant I continued, "This is also part of being in a Title I school, that many of our students' parents obviously, if they're living below the poverty line, chances

are their educational levels are not to the point which would make them more available for some of this [support]."

Professional development. I asked questions of the participants regarding their perceptions of the amount and type of professional development that is available to them, as well as whether they felt it was effective. The participants' responses described how they needed professional development that was relevant, job-embedded, and included being able to learn from their colleagues:

> *Participant A*: "We have the county-sponsored stuff during pre-planning, and we can always sign up for a workshop or something through the PL [Professional Learning] Department, but a lot of it is how to collect data or how to navigate the new teacher evaluation system. We have some PD here at the school, like sometimes our librarian will tell us about new technology or websites, and sometimes we have done some book studies, but it's always a separate issue and time has to be set aside for it."
>
> *Participant C*: "In this past school year I had the opportunity to attend L to J training with Lee Jenkins…this year I was able to implement it and I saw tremendous gains academically across the board. [Jenkins] says a lot of times children are given permission to forget. It's taught once and they move on…but this goes back and forces children to review what was taught in years past. It was a very relevant training because our students benefit so much from doing spiral reviews."

Participant D: “One of the major advantages of working in a Title I school is we have more opportunities for professional development. I was able to improve my résumé because I was able to do ESOL endorsements where the school was able to pay for subs while I went and observed other schools. I also got to do the Orton-Gillingham phonics training, which is very expensive, and we have student teachers that come here which I feel like is also an opportunity to grow professionally.”

Participant G: “What I find interesting is so often they will decide, I don’t know if it’s based on data or based on principal interest, to offer trainings at school say on a work day or pre-planning or post-planning, [but] so often in these trainings there might be a handful of people in the room who actually have never heard of it and need to learn everything. There might be a handful of people who may already be an expert… [and] a handful of people who have so much to do that they’re having a hard time mentally being there for the training. Generally speaking, the support I receive for professional learning tends to be semi-generic.”

Participant H: “One thing I’m really excited about for next year is we’re going to do a lot more with project-based learning. I’m going to be part of a workshop this summer to get that started.”

Participant I: “…they need to make sure that our PD is relevant to each of the [teachers’] classrooms without expecting them to go somewhere else to do it at night or whatever; they can interweave it within their regular things that they’re

doing and have it immediately displayed by what's happening in their classrooms."

Participant G agreed and added comments about professional development in the context of learning from colleagues. She stated,

"I wish teachers in Title I or otherwise had more chances to learn from each other. I know that comes down to a time issue, but I wish there was time built in…to allow us to go see each other doing our jobs. I honestly think that would be more beneficial than even bringing in a professional development presenter. I think we work with a lot of experts. I think if we had more time to put our heads together it would help."

Level of commitment. The final interview question asked participants about how many years they were going to continue as a Title I teacher. Their answers were fairly divided between those who said they would stay anywhere from 5-10 more years, and those who said they were looking to transfer to other schools or to another profession altogether.

Stayers. Many participants, as discussed in previous sections, described how committed they were to their students and while some said that is why they stay, others said it was simply because it was too late to start over in a new school:

Participant A: "Every once in a while I get that thought [of transferring]. Every year it seems there is a mass exodus of teachers who move to the more affluent schools where it's 'easier'. But I...can't imagine working anywhere else."

Participant C: "My heart is here, but the thought of starting over somewhere new, that doesn't sound appealing to me at all. Here I have a reputation; here I'm known. Maybe I could get to the point where my last years would be in a little easier environment. I definitely see the next 3 to 5 years here and then I'll have to play it by ear at that point."

Participant D: "You look at the different grade levels and their different perks and hardships and I feel like that's the same with a Title I versus an affluent school. They each have their own [issues]."

Participant F: "I plan to continue another 5 or 10 years, depending on if I can come out of the classroom and become an EIP [Early Intervention Program] or ESOL teacher."

Participant G: "I don't have plans at this point of leaving this school. If my family situation changes that would probably be a deciding factor."

Participant I: "Now, it's like I'm too old. I don't know how appealing I would be to another principal to go in knowing that I'm probably only going to teach about 4 or 5 more years, about maybe five and do they want to make that investment. Do I have enough to bring to the game to make it worth it to them? I'm not sure."

Leavers. Participants B, E, H, and J, however, discussed the fact that they would pursue other opportunities outside of the school as soon as they could do so.

Participant B: "I'm actively looking to transfer. I want to be somewhere that doesn't take so much out of you. Like I said before, I love these kids, but I just can't do it anymore. It's just too much."

Participant E: "I don't think about transferring to other schools. I think if I left…I would leave education. "

Participant H: "I think about it [transferring] every weekend. This year has been very difficult. I filled a few applications out in different places, starting I think it was about [last] December."

Participant J: "I feel like in this school there's not a lot of chance for upward mobility. I think it's like that in a lot of Title I schools because you are needed in the classrooms desperately. [I want to] be in a place honestly where I don't have to do as much as I do because I can't step back as a professional. I have a very hard time stepping back. I don't like dreading planning, Sunday nights, coming into the classroom. I don't know how to get there yet but I've been exploring a lot of other opportunities."

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine whether the district can support and retain veteran teachers in this Title I school in order to increase their levels of school commitment, which can contribute to a lower attrition rate and more continuity of instruction for students. The local problem prompting this study was the lack of understanding of veteran teachers' needs and concerns in an urban, high-poverty, Title I school, as well as the veteran teachers' levels of school commitment and attrition. The research design was a case study with interviews as the primary means of data collection. Veteran teachers with at least 6 years of classroom experience, currently teaching in a high-poverty Title I school, were the participants. The central research question guiding

data collection was: From the veteran teachers' perspective, how can the district support and retain veteran educators in the target school in order to increase their levels of school commitment? Semistructured interviews included about 12 questions designed to allow the participants to speak freely about their perspectives as veteran teachers in a Title I school. The hallmarks of qualitative research, including confidentiality of the participants' identity and data, were considered, as well as the reliability and trustworthiness of the data and any ethical concerns.

Despite the various student characteristics, including social, behavioral, and academic issues, the participants had good relationships with their students, as shown by their comments on how they care for their students and follow up with them after their students have left their classrooms. The teachers had high expectations for their students despite the challenges they encounter in their day-to-day efforts to educate their students. Teachers expressed qualities such as wanting to make a difference, being lifelong learners, and advocating for their students. Although it's not "all about the money," teachers would like more financial compensation than what has been given over the past few years.

More financial compensation was mentioned as a targeted support, as at least one teacher felt like the district did not appreciate the expertise of teachers who were considered to be veteran teachers and others felt as though less financial stress would help in coping with other stressors. Other targeted supports included more district support, more parental support, and more relevant, job-embedded professional

development. Most participants felt as though they had sufficient administrative support but that sometimes administrators “forget” what it is like to be in the classroom.

In addition to describing targeted supports, the participants discussed time as their biggest concern, which included having uninterrupted planning, being able to meet with colleagues and share ideas, and being able to teach. Participants felt as though, for reasons such as having too many administrative tasks or dealing with student social and behavioral issues, that there was not enough time to effectively teach their lessons. There was support staff available at the school, including counselors, but it was not always enough and class time must be taken to deal with student issues so that learning could occur and standards could be covered.

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), SDT is a means to understand how a person’s needs are met in the context of their environment, as well as how meeting those needs impacts a person’s motivation. Teachers in high-poverty schools are more likely to experience a variety of demands that may cause burnout and emotional exhaustion (Fernet et al., 2012). Although none of the teachers mentioned the word “burnout”, several teachers expressed that they would be pursuing other opportunities and possibly move to an environment that “doesn’t take so much out of you”. Other veteran teachers in this study demonstrated that if their needs are met, especially in the context of positive relationships with their students and adequate administrative support, they had more positive emotions and increased work engagement, which resulted in greater commitment to their school.

Based on the findings from the participant interviews, I determined that the teachers in the sample would like the means to meet with and learn from their colleagues, as well as receive job-embedded professional development that would provide support for their needs and concerns. Analysis of the data revealed that implementing professional learning communities (PLCs) was an effective way to create a culture of collaboration that will support teachers, which can increase their school commitment and retention in the field. Section 3 will contain a description of the project, "Effectively Implementing PLCs", along with the goals and rationale for the project. In addition, all aspects of the implementation of the project will be discussed, including an evaluation of the project and the implications for social change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to increase understanding of Title I veteran teachers' perspectives on their needs and concerns, as well as their levels of school commitment. The veteran teacher attrition rate at the study site had been in the double digits for several years, including the school year 2011-2012, when the attrition rate reached a high of 26%. Teacher attrition can result in loss of continuity of instruction for students and financial implications for the school system (Darling-Hammond, 2010). As part of the personnel goals in their 2012-2017 Strategic Plan, the school district would like to have "fewer inexperienced teachers in hard-to-staff subjects and schools; reduced turnover in hard-to-staff schools, [and] increased retention of effective employees." The personnel goals in the district's strategic plan are especially important in a high-poverty Title I school such as the study site, where over 80% of the students qualify for FRPL.

This study was conducted to give a voice to the veteran teachers and provide the story behind the numbers. Ten Title I veteran teachers from the study site were interviewed in the spring of 2015 as part of the study. The data collected in this qualitative study revealed the perceptions of the Title I veteran teachers. In addition to discussing their concerns regarding their students, participants described aspects of time as a critical need, including (a) uninterrupted planning time, (b) time to meet with colleagues, and (c) more time to teach instead of dealing with administrative tasks or student behavior. The participants described targeted supports, which included keeping

the administrative support they have, increasing district and parent support, and having more relevant, job-embedded professional development.

Based on the results from data collection in Section 2, I developed a project that describes 3 days of professional development training. The training will inform the entire teaching staff, not just the veteran teachers, about how to implement PLCs. Professional development on implementing PLCs will directly address the majority of their needs and concerns, as well as the targeted supports, discussed by the participants in the study. Teachers can meet, collaborate, use data to plan for instruction, learn from colleagues, and receive support for student behavioral issues. In subsequent sections, I will discuss the research on how effective PLCs can function to provide support for teachers in all aspects of educating their students. The following sections will also describe the project and its goals, the rationale for the project, implementation and evaluation, and implications for social change.

Description and Goals

The project encompasses 3 days of professional development based on implementing PLCs effectively (see Appendix A). The 3 days are designed to be carried out as one unit, not spread over any length of time or attended sporadically. Consistency is the key, as each day will build on the previous day(s). The project was formatted to address the problem identified in Section 1 and the data discussed in Section 2. The lack of understanding of the needs and concerns of Title I veteran teachers and the implications for the levels of commitment to their school will be addressed through professional development on effective implementation of PLCs.

The goals of the project, titled "Effectively Implementing PLCs," are

- to provide protected, uninterrupted time for teachers to meet with colleagues,
- to increase collaboration among teachers, which includes supporting each other and working as a team,
- to analyze student data to inform instruction,
- to learn strategies that meet the social and behavioral needs of students, and
- to provide more leadership opportunities as well as a format for giving teachers more of a voice in instructional decision-making.

Forming effective PLCs with these goals in mind will ultimately lead to three long-term goals: (a) increasing student achievement in all areas, especially in math and reading, as a result of using data to inform instruction, (b) providing teachers with support for their needs and concerns, which could increase their levels of school commitment, and (c) prioritizing time for teachers to meet and collaborate. According to the principal of the study site (personal communication, June 2, 2015), the school administration decided to allow grade level teams to meet after school twice a month in lieu of staff meetings that are normally scheduled for the coming school year.

Rationale

I considered and rejected other project genres for the problem in this study. A white paper, for example, would be sufficient for explaining the problem and proposing a solution (Hassel et al., 2015). A white paper could outline the problem, the resulting data, and the possibility of implementing PLCs at the study site to address the problem. Discussing the problem and a possible solution does not, however, allow me to utilize the

practitioner aspect of being a "scholar-practitioner" as the potential facilitator of the professional learning. A white paper does not provide an immediate solution to the problem of maintaining the school commitment of the veteran teachers who revealed themselves as "leavers" in the study, or the veteran teachers who indicated they remain at the study site because it is "too late to start over" at another school. The school district's personnel goals in their 2012-2017 Strategic Plan included "fewer inexperienced teachers in hard-to-staff subjects and schools, reduced turnover in hard-to-staff schools, [and] increased retention of effective employees." Stemming the tide of attrition and increasing school commitment for veteran teachers at the study site, where consistency of instruction is paramount for the students, demands a solution that can be implemented immediately.

A curriculum plan, which is another project genre, was also considered and rejected for several reasons. Teachers at the study site are required to follow a district curriculum plan, based on Common Core State Standards, which includes content and skills for students to master. Student achievement at the school, especially in math where 26% of students did not meet the benchmark on the annual state achievement test, is an aspect of the problem that needs an immediate solution. A curriculum plan would not solve the problem as there is already one in place that teachers are required to follow. The participants discussed academic concerns for their students; however, they also discussed social and behavioral concerns that contributed to the lack of academic achievement. A curriculum plan would not address the entirety of the concerns revealed by the participants in the study.

Writing in a recent blog post for the Learning and Teaching Department, a program specialist with the school district explained the district's goals for increasing achievement for students and supporting teacher learning. She commented, "High functioning PLCs are a must, as without collaboration and communication, transformation cannot occur." The district, however, has not provided training for schools in how to effectively implement PLCs. At the study site, grade level teams have traditionally met once a week to analyze data. Those teams that have the ability to work well together experience some success, but those teams that need guidance flounder and members tend more toward working in isolation than in collaboration (Sims & Penny, 2014). Most commonly in the district, professional learning is not job-embedded and occurs only as a result of new curriculum or testing initiatives.

I chose teacher training in implementing PLCs to address the problem of understanding the needs and concerns of veteran teachers in a Title I school. Mizell, Hord, Killion, and Hirsh (2011) stated, "the purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions they need to help students perform at higher levels" (p. 12). Research has shown that PLCs can support building capacity in teachers, which increases their school commitment and has the potential to increase the achievement of their students (Eyal & Roth, 2010; Jacobson, 2011; Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011; You & Conley, 2014). The data analysis in Section 2 revealed that the participants wanted uninterrupted planning time, including time to meet with colleagues. Participants also described many concerns related to their students, such

as academic, behavioral, and social issues. Participants expressed interest in relevant, job-embedded professional development that includes being able to learn from colleagues.

Over 20 years ago, Hargreaves (1994) wrote about the necessity of forming PLCs for teachers. Hargreaves advocated for the need to develop collaborative cultures in schools. Collaborating with colleagues, according to Hargreaves, allows teachers to discuss problems, analyze student data, and use shared knowledge to find solutions to guard against isolation and emotional exhaustion. Killion and Roy (2009) also studied how working in a collaborative professional learning team benefits teachers. They found that teachers felt as though their work as educators was more satisfying and inspiring. Killion and Roy also found that teachers who worked collaboratively experienced greater success in their endeavors with their students than if they had worked in isolation.

Forming PLCs among the grade level teams at the study site should address teachers' needs by providing (a) collegial support, (b) new skills learned in classroom contexts, (c) reciprocal mentoring between new and experienced teachers, and (d) an increase in teacher self-efficacy (Lumpe, Czerniak, Haney, & Beltyukova, 2012). The project genre, which is professional development that includes a training plan and optional follow-up book study, was chosen to help address the needs and concerns revealed in this qualitative study involving veteran teachers in a Title I school.

The content of the project should benefit all of the teachers at the study site, not just the study participants, as they navigate their increasing responsibilities in this age of high-stakes accountability (Green & Allen, 2015). The project should help address the problem because it will provide a means for the school to form a culture of collaboration

aimed at supporting teachers and increasing student achievement (Lumpe et al., 2012). The analysis of the data collected from the study site revealed that poverty and its accompanying issues are prevalent at the school. There are a significant number of ESOL students, and the levels of teacher commitment and student achievement could be higher. Learning how to implement a PLC effectively should allow the teachers to address the needs and concerns revealed during data collection and provide relevant, job-embedded professional development throughout the school year. As discussed in the following review of the literature, effective PLCs provide many benefits to the members, including greater school commitment from the teachers and increased student achievement.

Review of the Literature

I conducted a literature review to guide the development of the project in terms of the genre--professional development training--and the content--implementing PLCs effectively. Having conducted a search of the literature for Section 1, I was familiar with the databases and some of the search terms that would be the most beneficial for locating relevant studies. I used the search terms: *professional learning communities, principal leadership, collaboration, high-poverty schools, teacher commitment, student achievement, veteran teachers, adult learning theory, evaluation,* and *school improvement.* I also searched for research conducted by experts in the field of professional development and implementing PLCs, such as Hord, DuFour, Marzano, and Guskey. I found pertinent studies in databases such as ERIC, Education Research Complete, Sage, and Google Scholar. In this section, I focus on

- adult learning theory and teacher training,

- understanding the concept of PLCs, including how PLCs can create a culture of collaboration and achievement in a school, and
- the leadership role in implementing PLCs.

Genre: Professional Development with Teacher Training

Consider the scenario of a "typical" professional development session, according to Dever and Lash (2013): teachers attend a workshop about a topic chosen by their administrator, which is taught by a "renowned expert" (p. 12). The teachers do not pay attention, but rather "covertly grade papers…write notes back and forth…whisper…[and] text and play games on their phones" (Dever & Lash, 2013, p. 12). Not surprisingly, at the end of the session, the teachers return to their daily lives in the classroom and never utilize what was taught. Research has shown that implementing this type of professional development is not usually effective, as demonstrated by the scenario. Understanding learning styles, assessing what the teachers need, and focusing on shared visions and goals is not evident in the scenario. Unfortunately, this type of teacher learning has been all too common in many school districts (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2009; Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007).

Adult learning. According to Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005), adult learning, or andragogy, was discussed as early as 1833 when a German teacher first used *andragogik* to separate the learning of adults from children's learning (pedagogy). Adult learners utilize "self-directedness" (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 64), their life experiences, and needs based on their real life situations. Doran (2014), in a study of professional development for teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse learners, agreed and

recommended that "administrators…and teachers themselves consider teachers' interests, experiences, and self-identified needs in designing [professional development]" (p. 73). Doran found that teachers learn best when they can interact and share with colleagues and create a culture of collaboration.

Professional learning for teachers. Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011) took those ideas a step further. Professional learning for teachers, in this "era of reform" (p.81), should

- be collaborative and focus on "teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers" (p. 82),
- reflect real-world tasks and issues that come from teaching and learning,
- be ongoing and include aspects such as coaching, modeling, reflection, and inquiry, and
- connect to the school's mission and goals.

Learning how to implement PLCs effectively will allow the teachers to address the needs and concerns revealed during data collection and provide relevant, job-embedded professional development throughout the school year. PLCs led by teachers can provide educators some measure of influence over their professional learning. Having influence over their own learning helps teachers align their needs with their goals for increasing student achievement (Dever & Lash, 2013).

Project Content: Implementing PLCs

Implementing PLCs is not a new concept (Hord, 1997). However, PLCs have been gaining momentum in recent years as a means to tap into the shared knowledge of

educators and create a culture of collaboration. A culture of collaboration has been shown to provide greater support to teachers and to raise student achievement (Jacobson, 2011; Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2014). Analysis of the data collected in this study revealed the participants' need for planning time with colleagues, support for various student issues, and relevant professional development. The project, "Effectively Implementing PLCs", can address many of the needs and concerns of the teachers. Levine (2011) found that over time, collaborative PLCs can "create resources which help experienced teachers to change, including: norms…shared objectives; trust; some degree of continuity with the past; respect for experienced teachers; and traditions promoting morale" (p. 31). PLCs may also contribute to a positive school climate, which is facilitated by supportive relationships, shared decision-making, and opportunities for common planning for teachers (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009).

Implementing PLCs can be an important part of the work environment of teachers. Ladd (2011) found that teachers are more likely to move to another school or out of the profession altogether if they are not given sufficient time for planning and collaboration. However, beginning to work as PLCs is not without difficulty in some schools. Kougioumtzis and Patriksson (2009) found that teachers may not know how to form a PLC to work as a team and raise student achievement. Kougioumtzis and Patriksson also found that providing teachers with professional development in how to implement PLCs effectively is essential so that teachers learn how to participate in a

culture of collaboration. School leadership should provide appropriate resources and expanded teacher roles to facilitate the process (Ladd, 2011).

Initially, implementing PLCs can require the principal to decide the priorities for each team during their PLC meetings (Levine, 2011). Knowing their priorities can help keep the teams focused while they begin to change how grade level or team meetings were conducted in the past. For example, Levine (2011) studied a school in which the principal, for the first year of implementation, gave her staff a day-to-day focus of what should be accomplished in each PLC meeting. On some days, the principal led sessions on looking at student data (Levine, 2011). Other days, the PLCs used Critical Friends protocols to guide discussions of their teaching and any other instructional issues in their classrooms (Levine, 2011). National School Reform Faculty's (NSRF) (n.d.) website contains an extensive list of Critical Friends protocols. These protocols can be used as teachers begin to meet in PLC groups and form a culture of collaboration. You and Conley (2014) also recommend that principals "consider strategies that foster cooperative work efforts, particularly those involving veteran teachers" (p. 17). Having a focus can be a significant part of each PLC meeting, but there are several other important components involved in implementing PLCs and creating a collaborative culture.

Culture of collaboration. The overarching purpose of an effective PLC is to increase student achievement. However, forming a culture of collaboration in a school also provides support for teachers because they are receiving job-embedded professional development and can work as a team with their colleagues. Mathews, Holt, and Arrambide (2014) found that teachers who worked in a school that made the successful

transition to working as a PLC believed there were five essential components in implementing PLCs: (a) trust, (b) communication, (c) proximity, (d) team structure, and (e) an effective campus leader (pp. 26-27).

The first three components work together to help create a PLC. According to Mathews et al. (2014), open communication and trust between team members and school administration is essential. The findings from Mathews et al. are in line with what Lee et al. (2011) found, which is that trust among colleagues improves teacher efficacy in utilizing instructional strategies as well as managing student discipline. In addition, communication is directly related to trust. Channels of communication, both formal and informal, must exist between school leaders and teachers, as well as between the members of each PLC (Mathews et al., 2014). Teachers in the Mathews study also valued proximity to their team members. Situating an entire grade level in the same hallway facilitates informal communication between teachers who are members of the same PLC team. Having the components of trust, communication, and proximity in place help to facilitate structure for the teams.

DuFour and Mattos (2013) advocated for PLC team structures that allow for shared responsibility for student learning. Most PLC teams consist of members from the same grade level, led by a team leader. However, according to Mathews et al. (2014) teams should be structured in such a way as to involve all team members. DuFour and Mattos (2013) stated that involving all team members promotes shared decision-making, which allows teachers to have a voice in matters that affect what and how they teach.

Giving teachers a voice in decisions that affect them allows for the greater realization of motivating teachers to greater commitment to their schools (Ladd, 2011).

Finally, an essential component of effective PLCs is a strong campus leader--usually the principal--who uses transformational leadership practices to guide the staff (Ladd, 2011). Transformational leadership is "characterized by the articulation of a salient organizational vision and the empowerment of teachers" (Eyal & Roth, 2011, p. 267). Members of PLCs look to the principal to provide guidance in structuring the PLCs formed to address issues of teacher collaboration and related school improvement initiatives (Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2014). When principals either fail to provide direction or rely too heavily on mandates and rules, PLC group members are left to define their expectations in isolation (Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2014). Isolation does little to promote a culture of collaboration in which all of the PLC teams utilize shared vision and goals.

Role of school leadership. Research consistently shows that school leadership capability is one of the most critical factors in effective PLCs (Lee et al., 2011; Levine, 2011; Mathews et al., 2014; Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2014; You & Conley, 2014). School leadership, when implementing PLCs, should encourage trust among colleagues, shared decision making, data-driven instruction, and job-embedded teacher professional development (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012; Hulpia, Devos, & Van Keer, 2011; Jacobson, 2011; Mathews et al., 2014). Szczesiul and Huizenga (2014) underscored the importance of school leadership. They found that teachers wanted a supportive leader who would provide some direction and feedback in setting goals and tracking the teachers' progress in their PLCs.

There are many benefits of supportive leadership. As mentioned previously, transformational leadership, which is characterized by leaders who motivate their followers to commit to the common goals of an organization, has been shown to be the most effective form of leadership when creating a culture of collaboration (Eyal & Roth, 2011; Ladd, 2011). Transformational leadership, according to Eyal and Roth (2011), is linked to allowing teachers to improve their feelings of efficacy, which lowers burnout and increases their retention in the system. Hulpia et al. (2011) stated that school leaders who work toward "providing a clear school vision, translating this vision to teachers, and setting directions for teachers by providing professional development, [contribute] positively to the commitment of teachers to the school" (p. 753). An effect of supportive leadership is the organizational commitment of teachers.

Ladd (2011) also found that this type of leader provides: (a) relevant professional development opportunities, (b) more leadership roles for teachers, and (c) time for planning and collaboration. According to You and Conley (2014), principals who supported a collaborative work environment provided time for teachers to learn and to share ideas. Principals also encourage teachers to participate in shared decision-making and leadership opportunities. Van Droogenbroeck, Spruyt, and Vanroelen (2014) found that school leaders who involve their teachers in policy decisions helped the teachers understand and cope with pressures and changes that are imposed during school reforms. Amrein-Beardsley (2012) found that teachers wanted their principal to facilitate a "caring, integrated, professional community" (p.15) that included working closely with

the principal. Sharing in school leadership responsibilities was also an important factor in a study of recruiting teachers to high-needs school (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012).

When leaders do not provide sufficient guidance for teachers in implementing PLCs, it may be difficult for teachers to work toward a culture of collaboration (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). Lack of guidance from leadership can leave teams to make their own decisions in isolation and to have little motivation to collaborate in ways in which all members understand the purpose of a PLC (Szczesiul & Huizenga, 2014). Although teachers wanted formal processes in terms of direction and support, Szczesiul and Huizenga (2014) also made an important discovery when they found that even informal leadership processes create teams in which the members experience "interdependence and collective responsibility" (p. 187). Effective guidance from leadership can encourage working together and sharing accountability. Leadership can help create an environment in which teachers do not feel as isolated and are more likely to take risks in finding solutions to issues of school improvement.

Conclusion

Historically, teacher professional development has consisted of one-shot workshops that had little meaning to the teachers in attendance (Dever & Lash, 2013). The principal, rather than the teachers, decided what would be learned and brought in an "expert" to teach it. For educators in schools who wish to implement PLCs for the purposes of increasing student achievement and supporting teachers, understanding adult learning is a necessary first step. Research has shown that adult learners are self-directed and seek learning based on their needs and life experiences (Knowles et al., 2005).

Understanding adult learning principles increases the likelihood of success when planning teacher training.

Teacher training, according to Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin (2011), is most effective when it builds on how teachers learn best by concentrating on collaborative work that is focused on the real tasks and issues of teaching and learning. Teacher training should also be ongoing and connect to the school's mission and goals. PLCs are a means for teachers to receive this type of relevant, job-embedded training throughout the year. PLCs provide a forum for shared decision-making, which helps teachers influence their own learning as it relates to student learning. A review of the literature described the essential components of a PLC, including trust, communication, and proximity, and the importance of school leadership (Mathews et al., 2014).

Implementation

The project, titled "Effectively Implementing PLCs", will be completed during three professional learning days that fall before the official pre-planning week of the school year. The district administration, after reducing the school year from 180 days to 177 days as a cost-saving measure, opted to use the other 3 days of teacher contract time for professional learning. Each school administrator schedules the seminars or workshops for their teachers during the three days prior to pre-planning. The 3 days of teacher training in effective PLCs could be given during that time. The teacher training will be an important prerequisite in understanding PLCs so teacher groups can continue to meet in their learning communities for the remainder of the year.

After completion, the project will be evaluated using mixed methods, including surveys, interviews, and observations. PLCs will continue through the school year, and evaluation results will inform any changes that need to be made. A book study on *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement* by DuFour and Marzano (2011) will be offered for teachers who wish to participate and gain further information. Through this study, using the book as a resource, teachers will learn more about the work involved in being a member of a PLC.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

Many resources and supports are available at the school. The school site is classified as Title I, so there is a significant amount of funding available for professional development and technology. As the project developer, I will be guiding the initial training; there is no need to pay an "expert" to conduct the training. The three days of training will take place in the school's media center, which also contains the technology needed for presentations. An interactive board, projector, and speakers are permanent fixtures, and sufficient seating and table space exists for the staff to sit comfortably or to move around the room. Each teacher has their own laptop and iPad--both will be necessary throughout the training. Funding is also available to purchase the text for each participant of the follow-up book study. Significant resources and supports should allow the project to be successfully implemented.

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers may take the form of resistance to change on the part of some of the teachers. The study participants discussed wanting time to meet and collaborate with

colleagues. Other members of the PLC groups may not be as receptive to the requirement of working in collaborative groups on a structured, regular schedule. The project includes a sufficient amount of time for implementation. Dedicated time is unusual, as a lack of time is most often cited as a reason why teacher collaboration and effective professional learning does not take place (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2009; Yoon et al., 2007). Leadership can demonstrate respect for the time allotted for PLCs to meet by continuing to treat it as a priority and a non-negotiable aspect of the workday.

School districts have characteristically implemented multiple reforms at once, some of which are not sustainable. Some teachers may view PLCs as another reform that will run its course (DuFour, 2004). According to Bryk (2010), strong leadership can help counteract potential resistance by creating an environment of trust and support for risk-taking. Bryk maintained that principals may encounter educators who are reluctant to buy in to the implementation of PLCs. However, according to Bryk (2010), principals "must be prepared to use their authority to reform the school community through professional norms" (p. 28). Principals who recognize the need to exercise their authority but are able to do so by providing professional development that encourages working together can create an optimum environment for collaboration. Jo (2014) found that teacher professional development should provide opportunities to form positive relationships and cooperative skills. This type of environment could mitigate any resistance on the part of reluctant participants.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The project was designed to be implemented in three consecutive days. Each day builds on the previous day, culminating in having the participants function as a PLC as they analyze data and make decisions regarding instruction for the first math unit of the school year. Each of the 3 days contains active learning activities for the teachers, which are designed to elicit participation from the entire group. Teachers will be able to learn from each other and begin to build a culture of trust and collaboration.

A daily agenda will be provided to allow the teachers to see the focus of each day as well as to make the process transparent. In the interest of saving paper, the agendas will be available via Google Docs. Teachers will be informed of the purpose and goals for the day, along with an executive summary of this study. Teachers will be able to understand the relevance of the professional development, which is based on data collected from this study. Day 1 and Day 2 will contain instruction about the characteristics of a PLC and why implementing PLCs is important to support teachers and create an environment that encourages student achievement. A PowerPoint (see Appendix A) will help provide a visual resource for the concepts that will be explained. Several of the protocols from the National School Reform Faculty (n.d.) will be embedded as PDFs within the agendas. Teachers will be able to double-click on each PDF, which will open in PDF reader on their computers.

A follow-up book study—*Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement* by DuFour and Marzano (2011)--will be offered to participants. A study guide will also be provided (see Appendix A).

Depending on the number of participants, more than one study facilitator may be necessary. Possible facilitators could be the curriculum support teacher or other members of the leadership team, and I could also facilitate a group if necessary. The study groups will meet once a week to discuss one to two chapters at a time, following the study guide.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

As the project developer, I will have multiple responsibilities, but I will need to rely on others to accept some roles and responsibilities as well. My responsibilities include developing the agendas and gathering the training materials for each of the three days. I will also be responsible for conducting the mixed method evaluations at the end of the training. In addition, as part of the evaluation process, I will ascertain how many teachers will be participating in the follow-up book study so that I can ensure that enough copies of the book have been ordered. The school secretary, who has access to the school credit card, will be responsible for placing and tracking the order.

The principal will need to request appropriate climate control for the building for the three days, and provide bottled water and a few snacks for the participants. The principal will also provide chart paper, markers, and post-it notes for the activities, as well as copies of the data for Day 3. I would also like for the principal to include a short summary of the training in the staff letter that is sent prior to the three professional learning days and preplanning week. The principal and the administration will also participate in the training and act as models of the collaborative process. The media specialist will ready the room for a large group of people by making sure the tables are clear and the equipment is working.

The success of the training, in addition to planning the logistics, will depend on the participation of the teachers. Teachers will be expected to attend every session and to actively participate in discussions with colleagues. Although natural leaders emerge in every group, teachers should be responsible for encouraging leadership in others and rotating the tasks involved in implementing PLCs. When the evaluation is given at the end of the training, teachers should be able to reflect on the process and answer survey questions. I will also need about 5-10 participants to volunteer to be interviewed as part of the mixed methods evaluation.

Project Evaluation

Evaluating professional learning is an ongoing process and can be used to inform decisions about future professional development (Guskey, 2002). Evaluating professional development, according to Guskey (2002), can be accomplished with five levels. The levels are:

1. participants' reactions,
2. participants' learning,
3. organization support and change,
4. participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and
5. student learning outcomes (para. 6).

I have included summative evaluation procedures at the end of the 3 days of training that comprise the project. The evaluation will use mixed methods activities that follow each of Guskey's (2002) five levels, and will help determine what worked and what needs to be changed for future professional development. The PLCs will meet during the length of

the school year, therefore, mixed methods evaluation is appropriate to triangulate the data that is gathered after the project is completed. Multiple data points will provide a comprehensive evaluation of all aspects of the implementation of the project and subsequent implementation of PLCs.

First, to determine participant reaction, a Likert survey will be given to all of the teachers who attended the training. The survey (see Appendix A) will provide a quick, general assessment of participants' feelings regarding the training. Surveys will be anonymous, accessible online through Google Docs, and will be their "ticket out the door" at the end of Day 3. Next, participants' learning will be evaluated using a checklist utilized during observations of PLC groups on the afternoon of Day 3. Each PLC will have an administrator in the meeting, so the administrator will be able to observe and assess the process. The survey and the checklist are quantitative measures designed for evaluating the short-term goals of providing effective training to get the PLC process off to a good start for the year.

Once the training is complete and PLCs continue to be implemented throughout the year, the leadership team will meet bi-monthly. The leadership team consists of six classroom teachers, one ESOL teacher, one special education teacher, one special area teacher (art, music, or PE) teacher, two school counselors, the curriculum support teacher, two assistant principals, and the principal. Over 80 certified teachers make up the teaching staff, with between seven and 12 teachers (including ESOL and special education) on each grade level, which will result in more than six PLC groups formed for the year. Grade level chairs will be able to present minutes of their PLC meetings and

discuss how they are progressing. Minutes of the leadership team meetings will be published to staff in the interest of keeping them informed as well. The minutes will provide a qualitative evaluation of the process and another means of determining the effectiveness of the training.

Next, evaluating Level 4--participants' use of new knowledge and skills--will take the form of qualitative semi-structured interviews with participant volunteers. I will conduct the interviews using an interview protocol (see Appendix A). Interviews will be ongoing through the year, several times a month, as PLCs are implemented. The interview responses will provide valuable information from the teacher perspective about how PLCs are progressing. The rest of the school year after the initial training is approximately 8 months. This time period will allow me to interview about 24 participants and gather data on what is working during PLC meetings. This evaluation method will provide data toward evaluating the long-term goal of providing support for teachers using the PLC format.

An anonymous quantitative survey will be offered to participants at the end of the school year to evaluate the entire process of implementing PLCs. Teachers will be able to access the survey via an online platform such as Survey Monkey. The survey will contain questions about teachers' perceptions of the level of support offered by PLCs and whether they feel as though their efficacy and commitment levels have fallen, stayed the same, or improved as a result. Results from the final survey, data from the semi-structured interviews, walk-through checklists, and meeting minutes will all inform the professional development that is planned for the following year.

The long-term goal of the next steps for the following year is to continue to offer teacher support and job-embedded professional development using the PLC format. The leadership team will meet over the summer and determine a focus for the following year based on the evaluation data collected after the project is implemented. Short-term goals include continuing to provide an enduring culture of collaboration that provides teacher support and increased student achievement.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

The project, which was developed as a response to the problem of understanding Title I veteran teachers' needs and concerns, has implications for stakeholders in the local community. Research has shown that supporting and keeping veteran teachers in a school is important to preserving the continuity of instruction for students (Lee et al., 2011; Levine, 2011; You & Conley, 2014). Ensuring teachers' level of commitment to their school can have a positive effect on student achievement. The project, "Effectively Implementing PLCs" has the potential to provide support for all teachers at the school, not just veteran teachers, as the teachers learn how to create a culture of collaboration and share responsibility for student learning.

Creating a culture of collaboration through PLCs will allow teachers to make data-driven instructional decisions, discuss issues related to their practice, and learn from each other. Teachers will be able to experience greater success in increasing student achievement, learn effective strategies for dealing with student behavior, and feel more supported by not working in isolation. In addition, PLCs provide a means for shared

decision-making and leadership opportunities, which further contributes to teacher efficacy and school commitment. Ensuring a stable teaching force facilitates student achievement and ultimately, more productive members in the community that surrounds the school. Administrators also benefit from a more stable teaching force as fewer new teachers have to be trained and acclimated to the culture of the school.

Far-Reaching

In the larger context, this work can be a model for other schools or districts that view teacher commitment and student achievement as priorities. Teachers are juggling more and varied responsibilities in this era of high-stakes testing. All teachers can benefit from feeling supported and learning how to share responsibility for student learning in a culture of collaboration. In addition, professional learning opportunities can be created for teachers based on the research conducted for the project. Creating more opportunities for relevant, job-embedded professional development for teachers can only enhance teaching and learning in our schools.

Effective professional development within a culture of collaboration can raise teacher efficacy and feelings of commitment to their schools. In the long term, when teacher commitment to their schools is higher, veteran teachers are able to provide better mentoring for newer teachers, 30% of whom are likely to leave the profession within their first 5 years (Darling-Hammond, 2010). The price of new and veteran teacher attrition can reach into the billions of dollars and have a significant impact on school district budgets (Darling-Hammond, 2010). A more stable teaching force can lower those

costs and allow for more funding to be directed toward where it is need most—our schools.

Conclusion

The project, based on data collected and reported in Section 2, was developed to address the problem of understanding the needs and concerns of Title I veteran teachers and their levels of school commitment. Three days of teacher training on implementing PLCs was created to help teachers learn to create a culture of collaboration that will provide job-embedded professional development and a means to increase student achievement. The goals of the training included increasing collaboration among the teachers, providing protected time for analyzing student data, learning strategies to support each other and their students, and creating more leadership opportunities for teachers. The project also includes the opportunity for teachers to have their first PLC meeting as they learn to analyze math data and plan instruction accordingly.

Section 3 also contained a literature review that informed the development of the project. The literature review discussed findings from studies on adult learning, teacher training, and implementing PLCs. I outlined a timeline and discussed the roles of others and myself in implementing the project. Resources and supports for the project were disclosed, as were potential barriers. Local and far-reaching implications of the project included creating a culture of collaboration that will support teachers and possibly increase their school commitment. In addition, the project can serve as a means for relevant, job-embedded professional development. The process of assessing the success

of the project was outlined using Guskey's (2002) five levels of evaluating professional development.

Section 4 contains a discussion of the project's strengths and recommendations for remediation of limitations. Project development and evaluation is included to help the reader understand the process. I also discuss what I have learned about scholarship and leadership and change. I analyze myself as a scholar, a practitioner, and a project developer. Section 4 concludes with the project's potential impact on social change is discussed, as are the implications, applications, and directions for future research as a result of the study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This study was developed based on my observation of a double-digit veteran teacher attrition rate over several years at the study site. I also determined that there was a paucity of qualitative research on veteran teachers' perspectives of their needs and concerns. I identified this as a problem not only in terms of personnel and financial impacts to the school system, but also in terms of disrupting the continuity of learning for the students. The study site is a high-poverty, Title I elementary school. I learned through a review of the literature that although teacher attrition is problematic overall, the impact can be greater at a Title I school. After interviewing 10 Title I veteran teachers and analyzing the data, I found that the participants cared greatly for their students and had high expectations for them both during and after the time spent in their classrooms. I also found that the participants wanted support in the form of more time to meet with and learn from colleagues, as well as receive job-embedded professional development.

I developed a project whereby teachers at the study site could learn how to implement PLCs. PLCs have been shown to provide many forms of support to teachers as well as to possibly increase their school commitment and retention in the profession. In this section, I discuss reflections on the strengths and limitations of the project, as well as an alternative to the project in the form of peer coaching. I also discuss how the project was developed and evaluated, and how it will influence positive social change at the study site as well as for veteran teachers as a whole. I reflect on my pursuit of scholarship

and provide an analysis of myself as a leader, scholar and practitioner, as well as a project developer. I conclude with recommendations and directions for future research.

Project Strengths

The project, "Effectively Implementing PLCs," has several strengths. First, the project was developed as a response to data collected as part of an investigation into the problem of understanding Title I veteran teachers' needs and concerns. Components of the project are directly related to remediating the problem that exists at the study site, which also includes teachers' levels of commitment to the school. Second, the teachers will be receiving instruction that is research-based. Many researchers, such as Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) and DuFour (2004), have written extensively on PLCs and their effect on teacher efficacy and student achievement. In addition, the activities in the project were developed using research on adult learning and teacher professional development.

A second strength of the project is the method of evaluation, which is also research-based. Guskey's (2002) process for evaluating professional development, which includes five levels that lend themselves to using both quantitative and qualitative measures, was used to evaluate the project. The project will be evaluated using surveys, interviews, and teacher reflections. A significant amount of data about the success of the project will be gathered using the multiple methods. Also, the evaluation will be the beginning of ongoing formative evaluations as the PLC teams meet through the year.

A final strength of the project is its potential to impact teacher commitment and student achievement at the study site or other schools with a similar problem. As

discussed earlier, extensive research has been conducted on the characteristics of PLCs that impact teacher efficacy and student achievement. The training in the project sets the stage for dedicated time for teachers to meet and continue a culture of collaboration for the school year. Once teachers complete the training described in the project, they will be equipped with tools to continue as PLC teams throughout the rest of the year. Effective PLC implementation will provide the teachers with a means to discuss student data, support each other, and receive job-embedded professional development.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

Although every effort has been made to address any possible limitations in the project, remediation of limitations must be considered. Resistance to change, especially among veteran teachers, is a common limitation when schools attempt to effect change through professional development (Stan, Stancovici, & Palos, 2013). Awareness of possible resistance is important so supports can be put into place to help teachers see the intrinsic value of what they are learning and how it will enhance their teaching and their students' learning (Stan et al., 2013). Initially establishing a climate of trust between school leadership and teachers is another means to overcome resistance to change (Kondakci, Beycioglu, Sincar, & Ugurlu, 2015). Teachers' job satisfaction and feelings of burnout are related, so school leadership would do well to ensure that the very conditions they are trying to avoid are not created by the changes they are trying to make (Kondakci et al., 2015).

The current study and the project suggest that teachers' levels of commitment could be increased by providing support for the various aspects discussed by the

participants, including facilitating more positive relationships with colleagues (Jo, 2014). The project described implementing PLCs in the school, which have been shown to increase teacher efficacy and student achievement (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; Mathews et al., 2014). Forming PLCs and continuing to utilize them for teacher collaboration is time-consuming. More pressing needs inherent in a school may take precedence over providing time for teachers to meet and do the work involved in implementing PLCs. An alternative for addressing the problem may be to establish a coaching model in the school (Collet, 2012).

Collet (2012) advocated for a gradual increase of responsibility (GIR) model of coaching. Coaches, who could be master teachers or administrators, would work with teachers one on one and provide support, feedback, recommendations, and modeling for teachers' work in the classroom. Collet (2012) found that the GIR model helped improve teachers' skills in the context of their daily work, which is the aim of job-embedded professional development. Using a GIR model may be an alternative solution to the time-consuming nature of implementing grade level PLCs, although the opportunity to collaborate with other colleagues might be limited. If a GIR model was used in preparation for or to strengthen the work of PLCs, however, the investment in pairing coaches with teachers could pay off. Although the coaching model may not be as far-reaching as working in PLCs, teachers would still be able to complete the collaborative work necessary for successful schools (DuFour, 2004).

Scholarship

Scholarship, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is "serious formal study or research of a subject" ("Scholarship," 2015). Scholarship requires persistence and the ability to set aside one's own biases in pursuit of the larger truth. It also requires being able to look at a study that was conducted by another researcher and compare it to other studies and to one's own research to see how all of the pieces fit together. Recognizing a real world problem such as teacher attrition and collecting data in pursuit of finding a solution to the problem entails incorporating other researchers' study results into the current findings. This process circles back around to the definition of scholarship. I believe scholars are never completely finished with the endeavor to provide others with the means to grow and change the way they view the world around them. The pursuit of scholarship is essential to allowing new information to be considered in the context of what has previously been studied.

I now consider myself a scholar as I am able to recognize the names of researchers when they are cited in other studies. Early classes in this degree process required viewing videos of other scholars in order to learn about the topic at hand. I remember thinking, during one such video, "How are they able to remember and quote researchers so easily?" Now I know how the scholars in the videos were able to quote research to support the points they were making. It is a result of being immersed in your study; you begin to see the "major players" who research particular topics. I now know who the respected scholars are in their fields and I can find studies to support my own research.

Finding studies to support my research became the easy part of the process. From the beginning of my doctoral journey, I faced a significant challenge in learning how to write in scholarly language. Although I am still learning, my writing has improved from the course papers I wrote early on in my studies. I gained more familiarity with APA formatting and the significance of writing in an active voice. I appreciated the many resources and webinars provided by Walden's Writing Center, which I could access any time to further my repertoire of skills needed to write as a scholar. Reading the studies of others who have come before me also assisted as I learned how to format a study and write about the results.

Conducting a research study from beginning to end involved many new experiences for me. Schoolwork has always come easy to me, from elementary school and on into my master's degree. Even the coursework at the beginning of my doctoral journey, although labor intensive, was relatively easy to complete. When I reached the point of writing a prospectus and then a proposal, I hit a proverbial brick wall. I was not accustomed to having my work returned for revision. The process of revising my work, however, became easier as time progressed, and I discovered the value in digging deeper and providing more clarity in my writing. The process helped me to become a better writer and to think about my audience and the purpose for writing. I also analyze others' writing more critically for content and relevance to my study.

Project Development and Evaluation

As part of my scholarship journey, I developed this project as a response to the data that I collected while researching this study. The data collected from 10 Title I

veteran teachers revealed that they had many needs and concerns, some of which were not being addressed in the context of their work environment. This project took shape in order to provide the teachers and administrators with a vehicle for establishing a collaborative culture, which can support the teachers, increase their school commitment, and affect student achievement. The project provided professional development in how to effectively implement PLCs. PLCs are a means for educators to meet, share student work, analyze data, find solutions to problems or issues in their practice, and receive job-embedded professional development.

The professional development training focused on active learning for the teachers. Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) advocated for teacher training to not only address how teachers learn, but to allow them time to practice and reflect on what they have learned. PLCs address these aspects by providing a format for teachers to meet, talk, analyze, and brainstorm. The project was structured in such a way as to consider the needs of the teachers as learners by providing hands-on activities combined with time to collaborate and learn from each other, as well as to study current research. This is experiential learning, which, according to Benander (2009), requires that the learner participate, reflect, and subsequently incorporate new learning into practice.

Evaluation of the project implementation should be ongoing and should reflect feedback from the participants (Guskey, 2002). Just as classroom instruction with students is fluid, so is teachers' professional learning. Learning grows and changes according to how the learners incorporate new knowledge and assimilate it with knowledge they have already gained. In learning how to conduct research, I understood

how utilizing multiple methods of collecting data help ensure greater validity of the results of a study. As the project developer, I incorporated multiple data points for evaluating the project in order to triangulate the data and increase the reliability. Using a mixed methods evaluation for this project will allow me to use the most appropriate method of collecting data for each aspect of the project. Collecting relevant data will assist in planning for future professional development as PLCs continue to be implemented during the school year.

Leadership and Change

As a result of earlier coursework at Walden, I learned about transformational and transactional leadership styles. Transactional leaders lead using a system of rewards and consequences--little is done to facilitate a sense of trust and commitment to the leader (Harrison, 2011). On the other hand, transformational leadership motivates followers to trust the leader and to participate in working together to achieve goals based on a shared vision (Harrison, 2011). In addition, transformational leadership in a school enables positive change by encouraging shared leadership among teachers. Shared leadership results in greater collaboration, shared decision making, and shared responsibility for student learning.

As a teacher leader and through my own experience, I have learned that teachers need to feel heard through shared decision making. In this way, they are more likely to buy in to changes that need to occur in the school climate in order to increase student achievement. Because of this, part of the project involves training participants about the importance of PLCs as an environment for them to make decisions based on their own

and their students' needs. Along with supportive leadership from the administration, teachers can be given opportunities to use their strengths in contributing to shared leadership in PLCs. As Szczesiul and Huizenga (2014) have found, a lack of leadership results in teams making their own decisions in isolation and setting their own focus, which is not conducive to creating a collaborative culture and effecting change. Positive change can only occur when the school climate is such that collaboration and sharing of ideas is based on shared vision and goals.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

The definition of the word scholarship reflects the entire process that I have undertaken as a student at Walden. I started this journey more than three years ago and worked continuously to demonstrate scholarship in this process as I worked through my core classes and now in my study. Although I consider myself to be a life-long learner, this has been the most difficult, yet most rewarding, learning that I have ever experienced. While on this journey, I learned that becoming a true scholar requires dedication, persistence, critical thinking, and the ability to keep the larger picture in mind as each stage is completed.

Part of the larger picture involves my becoming an expert in my field. Although I am most accustomed to monitoring growth in my students, I have been able to see a lot of growth in myself as a learner as the process has gone forward to this culminating project. I started my doctoral degree with very little knowledge as to how to read a research study, synthesize it, and incorporate it into new knowledge. I learned very quickly, however, and I experience more confidence now as I have conducted two literature

reviews for this study. Being able to locate, synthesize, and apply research has helped me to become an expert in my field.

The next steps in my journey as a scholar will involve continuing to utilize the skills I have acquired by making greater contributions to the existing body of research. I am excited about the possibility of conducting other studies on teacher commitment and high-poverty schools. Although I rejected the idea of a white paper as a project for this study in favor of a more practical, immediate solution, I see the importance of demonstrating what I have learned beyond an executive summary of the study. Once this paper is complete and published, I will begin work on a white paper for publication for my education sorority's peer-reviewed journal, *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin.* Being known as a scholar in my field inspires me to contribute to understanding education at a higher level.

Understanding education at a higher level will also help me to affect change at the local level. Conducting this study in a school where I had previously been employed required me to set aside my biases and gather data from the perspective of a researcher whose scholarship could possibly contribute to greater understanding of a problem. I learned that I enjoy gathering qualitative data and analyzing it for themes and patterns. Colleagues now look to me for information, and I am able to communicate best practices that are research based. I plan to continue to help fellow educators learn how to support each other and themselves in order to facilitate effective learning for our students.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As a practitioner, I have learned how to improve not only my own learning, but my teaching as well. Hutchings (2010) explains, "teaching, like learning, is intellectual work, work that can be improved through systematic inquiry, critique, and collaboration within a diverse community of learners, be they teachers or students; indeed, it strives to make better learners of both" (p. 70). Throughout this process, I have learned how to apply my own learning to the process of teaching my students and implementing professional development for my colleagues. Although I have previous experience in providing professional learning for paraprofessionals, I now have greater confidence that I can provide professional learning for my teacher colleagues that will have a significant impact on their practice. Greater confidence in presenting professional learning is a direct result of the hours of research and planning I have accomplished for this project study.

As an educator with over 20 years of experience, I have never allowed myself to become stagnant. Each year, with each new group of students, I look for ways to incorporate new ideas and new methods. I recognize that I cannot teach today's students in the same way I taught yesterday's students. As a result of the doctoral process, I am more confident that I can access, evaluate, and utilize research to positively influence my teaching. I am able to advocate for and support best practices with research studies, as well as perform my own action research in order to determine what is working to help my students achieve.

I have also gained skill in my leadership abilities. I have been a member of the leadership team in both schools that I have been employed in for the past decade. I have

been a teacher leader, a new teacher mentor, and will now mentor two veteran teachers as they navigate their master's degree program. I knew when the teachers asked me to mentor them during their program that I had established myself as a leader with a reputation for being able to guide and support my colleagues. This is a direct result of the skills I have gained during my doctoral journey. Being able to lead effectively is an important aspect of being a scholar-practitioner. I have come to the end of this rigorous process but I will not stop learning; I will continue to improve my practice as I learn from my colleagues, learn from my students, and learn from experts in my field.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

Although I have developed trainings on a smaller scale—a total of about 9 hours—for the paraprofessional staff at my school, developing this project took a lot more time and effort. This project made me appreciate those who have gone before me and developed trainings that I have attended as part of my continuing education. I used research-based information for the paraprofessional training, as I have done for this project, as well as incorporated various learning styles into the activities. The paraprofessional training I developed was based on a need that I identified at my school, just as this project was developed based on the data I collected in my study. Given my prior, if limited, experience in developing professional learning, it was still helpful in formatting this project for my study.

Many of the participants in the study indicated that they consider themselves lifelong learners. I was mindful that most teachers, who are accustomed to providing the instruction, have to adjust to sitting on the opposite side of the desk, so to speak, and

becoming learners themselves (Benander, 2009). The project development included ensuring that the training was relevant, addressed all learning styles, and allowed the teachers to learn from each other in the process. Reviewing the literature on adult learning and effective professional development allowed me to incorporate best practices in the development of the project in order to ensure that all aspects, including the evaluation phase, would be effective. Although this is just a start, I feel as though I gained valuable insight and experience that will, in the future, enable me to assess a need in my school community and to develop and implement more training as a response.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

An important part of Walden University's mission is promoting positive social change. There is a lot at stake in developing and implementing this project. Effectively Implementing PLCs was developed out of a need to help solve a problem—increasing school commitment and lowering attrition for veteran teachers--that has the potential to impact multiple stakeholders in my educational community. This project also has the potential to positively impact not only the school community where the study took place, but also the surrounding school communities. When experienced, effective teachers leave their schools, especially high-poverty schools, research has shown that not only does this impact the continuity of student instruction, but it costs money that few school districts have in this era of budget cuts (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Donaldson, 2009; Eslinger, 2014; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Hughes, 2012; Ronfeldt et al., 2011). Therefore, school districts and administrators should make it a priority to keep effective teachers in

their schools in order to create a stable teaching force and to increase student achievement.

This project can assist administrators in supporting teachers, especially veteran teachers, in order to increase their school commitment and lower the level of attrition. Implementing PLCs can provide a means for teachers to collaborate, learn from each other, receive job-embedded professional development, and make data-driven decisions for increasing student achievement. The training in this project cannot only be implemented at the study site, but it can also be implemented in surrounding schools in the district. In addition, the project training could be given to school administrators in the district, who can go back to their schools and train their teachers. Utilizing this training to help create a culture of collaboration in schools is a move toward social change as it has the ability to positively impact teacher commitment and attrition. Keeping effective teachers in their schools, especially high-poverty schools, has the potential to increase student achievement over time, which is the ultimate goal of stakeholders in any educational community.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Throughout this process, I have learned the difficult yet rewarding aspects of conducting research in the educational field. This study was qualitative in nature, which allowed me to understand the perspectives of my participants as they discussed their needs and concerns as Title I veteran teachers. Conducting qualitative research is important in being able to gain insight into how the participants, as in this case study, construct the reality of their work environment. Quantitative research is important as

well. Research methods such as surveys can be given to large numbers of participants and results are more generalizable.

In terms of future research, a mixed methods study might be applicable in gathering a greater amount of data about the problem of teacher commitment and attrition. Although the main source of data for this study was teacher interviews, a significant amount of data was generated in regard to the participants' perspectives. Conducting a survey with a larger number of participants and interviewing a small percentage of the sample could provide even more information. Focus groups and observations of veteran teachers could also increase the knowledge base about this particular problem. Other sources of data such as these would also allow for greater triangulation of data and more generalizability of results.

Another direction for future research, in addition to using other research methods, is to conduct the study at other sites. According to the literature, teachers in all high-poverty schools have many of the same concerns and experiences. Conducting this study in a rural as opposed to an urban school would provide a valuable comparison. A researcher could also compare attrition rates of veteran teachers in more affluent schools with the attrition rates of veteran teachers in high-poverty schools and investigate reasons for differences, if any. Surveying or interviewing veteran teachers who have already left their schools before retirement could allow administrators and school districts to stop a problem before it starts. Additional data could assist in understanding why those teachers left early and implementing policies to keep the teachers already on staff.

Keeping their teachers, as shown by this study, has serious implications for the education field. Administrators and school districts can implement policies that support their veteran teachers, who can be a valuable source of experience and knowledge. Veteran teachers are needed to mentor and support those new to the profession: new teachers have an attrition rate of as much as 50% within their first 5 years (Darling-Hammond, 2010). There are many issues for administrators to focus on in the current educational climate, but supporting and providing for their teachers should be a priority as teachers are in the classroom instructing students on a daily basis. Effective, knowledgeable, and experienced teachers can be a powerful force in increasing student achievement (Hughes, 2012; Sass et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The focus of this project study was veteran teachers' perspectives of their needs and concerns as they educate their students in a high-poverty, Title I school. The results of the study indicated that the participants cared for their students, but were concerned about the various social and academic issues that come from living in poverty. Participants also wanted more time to meet with their colleagues, collaborate and learn from them, and receive relevant, job-embedded professional development. I developed a project, which will allow teachers at the study site to receive training in how to implement PLCs. PLCs provide many forms of support to teachers, including increasing their school commitment and retention in their profession.

In this section, I discussed how the project was based on research studies but could possibly be limited by teacher resistance. I included an alternative to the project in

the form of peer coaching. I outlined how the project was developed, including evaluation, and how it could have local as well as far-reaching implications for social change. I reflected on my role as a scholar-practitioner as what I have learned during this process will help me to become a leader in my field. I concluded with recommendations and directions for future research. The recommendations and directions for future research are avenues that I would like to explore in the future. I would like to work toward affecting my local school site and others as I seek to illuminate more understanding of veteran teachers' needs and concerns. Supporting experienced teachers is crucial to the success of our education system, as demands on teachers grow larger and more varied in our 21st century world.

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Appendix A: The Project

Preliminary Information for Participants
(Available via Google Docs)

- Effective PLCs provide dedicated time for teachers to meet, analyze data, discuss issues related to teaching and learning, and promote a culture of collaboration.

- The [redacted] Department of Education (2014) has established School Keys, which are a set of standards that guide all aspects of teaching and learning in its schools. PLCs will allow us to maintain a focus on these, and other, standards:

    - Uses common assessments to monitor progress, inform instruction, and improve teacher practices

        - The data from the common assessments are analyzed down to the item level, and the results are used to inform instruction and improve teacher.
        - Adjusting instruction based on assessment data is common practice across the school.

    - Provides an orderly, well-managed learning environment

        - Teachers throughout the school provide an orderly, well-managed environment that is conducive to learning and free from interruptions. Students consistently stay on task and take responsibility for their own behavior.

    - Enables students to attain higher levels of learning through differentiated instruction

        - Teachers plan and implement multiple means of representation, engagement, action, and expression to meet the learning needs of the students.

    - Shares a common vision/mission that defines the school culture and guides the continuous improvement process

        - A common vision/mission has been collaboratively developed, communicated, and implemented.
        - The daily work and practices of staff consistently demonstrate a sustained commitment to continuous improvement.

- Aligns professional learning with needs identified through analysis of a variety of data
    - School and district leaders and other staff collaboratively analyze relevant data from multiple sources on an ongoing basis to determine professional learning needs.
- Uses multiple professional learning designs to support the various learning needs of the staff
    - Staff members actively participate in in-depth professional learning that engages collaborative teams in a variety of appropriate learning designs.
    - Many of the various designs are job-embedded and are consistently aligned with the intended improvement expectations.
- Allocates resources and establishes a support structure to ensure the effectiveness of professional learning
    - A comprehensive infrastructure of support including scheduling adequate collaborative time and model classrooms is in place to support and sustain professional learning.
    - Opportunities to practice skills, receive follow-up, feedback, and coaching are provided to ensure the effectiveness of professional learning.
- Cultivates collaborative inquiry and learning that enhance individual and collective performance
    - Collaborative inquiry is viewed as foundational practice at the school as administrators and staff continually engage with colleagues to construct knowledge, acquire skills, refine practice, examine dispositions, and provide feedback that will enhance individual and collective performance.
- Monitors and evaluates the impact of professional learning on staff practices and student learning
    - The administrators and other school leaders have developed and implemented a comprehensive process for the ongoing monitoring and evaluation of professional learning based on changes in educator practices and increases in student learning.
- Implements collaborative, distributed leadership
    - Leadership is efficiently distributed across the school.

- Administrators collaborate regularly with staff members to gather input and to provide opportunities for shared decision-making and problem-solving.
- Staff members are provided numerous opportunities to build their leadership capacities.

Day 1 Professional Learning Session
What are PLCs and Why Do We Need Them?
All grade levels, K-5

Purpose: Participants will learn to recognize the elements of effective PLCs and understand the reasons for implementing PLCs as part of a successful school environment. Participants will also understand that forming professional networks within their school can assist in helping them to have a voice in instructional decisions and feel more supported by working collaboratively with peers.

- An executive summary of the current study will be discussed so that participants will be able to see why this professional learning was developed.

Goals: Participants will work as grade level PLCs to learn how PLCs can impact their work environment and student achievement:

- participants will understand how PLCs support the School Keys,
- participants will understand the research behind PLCs for supporting teachers in their professional development,
- participants will learn how to work collaboratively with members of their grade level team,
- participants will learn teaching and learning strategies required to promote high student achievement, and
- participants will examine the beliefs, vision, and mission of our school.

Professional Learning Community Session Agenda

8:30 All teaching staff meets in the cafeteria

- Welcome, review purpose and activities for the day
- Executive summary of the study that prompted this professional learning
- Answer questions
- Overview of purpose of PLCs (PowerPoint)

What does the research say?

"Teachers who have access to teacher networks, enriched professional roles, and collegial work feel more positive about staying in the profession" (Darling-Hammond, 1996).

"PLCs…provide support for teachers' collective learning and application, all of which will finally contribute to the improvement of teachers' collective efficacy on instructional strategies and student discipline as well as the enhancement of their commitment to students" (Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011).

What is a PLC?

"In a professional learning community, principals and teachers engage in collective inquiry to decide on the work that will most benefit their students" (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

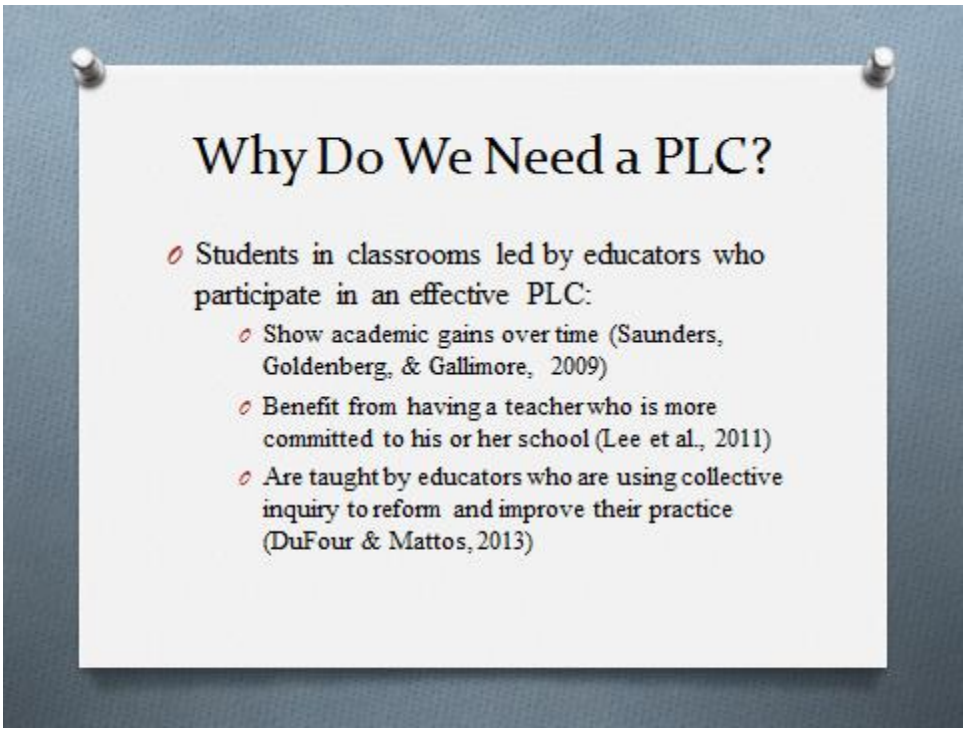
Educators in a PLC...

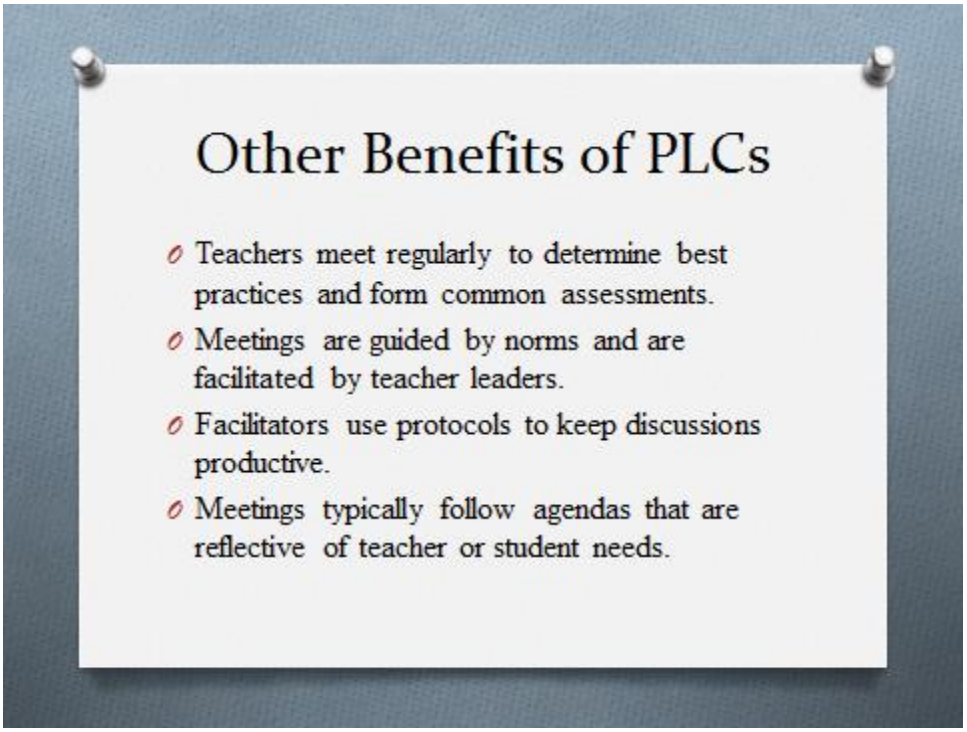
- have shared vision and values
- are collectively responsible for student learning
- reflect on their own practice
- collaborate with others
- support others
- share leadership
- are continuous learners—learning from each other, from current research, and from relevant "on the job" situations

From http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/virtualwkshp/virtualwkshp005.shtml

Why Do We Need a PLC?

- Teachers:
  - are given the opportunity for more leadership responsibility
  - have a voice in instructional decision-making
  - may feel better equipped to address the various needs of their students
  - are more likely to reflect on their practice
  - receive job-embedded PD


Why Do We Need a PLC?
Students in classrooms led by educators who participate in an effective PLC:
Show academic gains over time (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009)
Benefit from having a teacher who is more committed to his or her school (Lee et al., 2011)
Are taught by educators who are using collective inquiry to reform and improve their practice (DuFour & Mattos, 2013)


Other Benefits of PLCs
Teachers meet regularly to determine best practices and form common assessments.
Meetings are guided by norms and are facilitated by teacher leaders.
Facilitators use protocols to keep discussions productive.
Meetings typically follow agendas that are reflective of teacher or student needs.

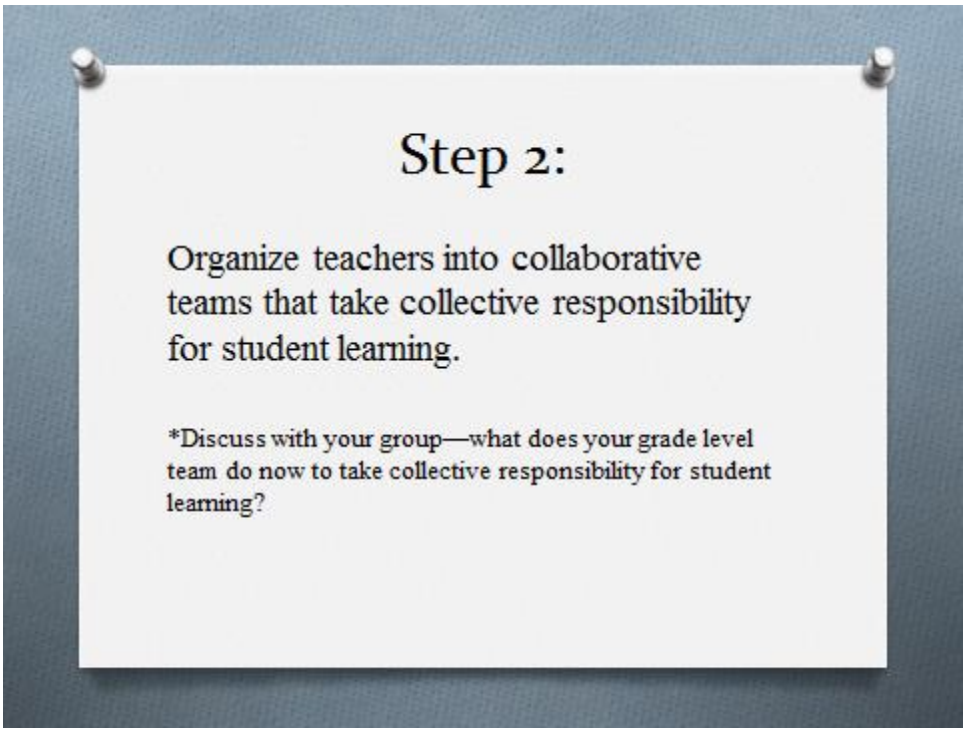
How are PLCs Formed?

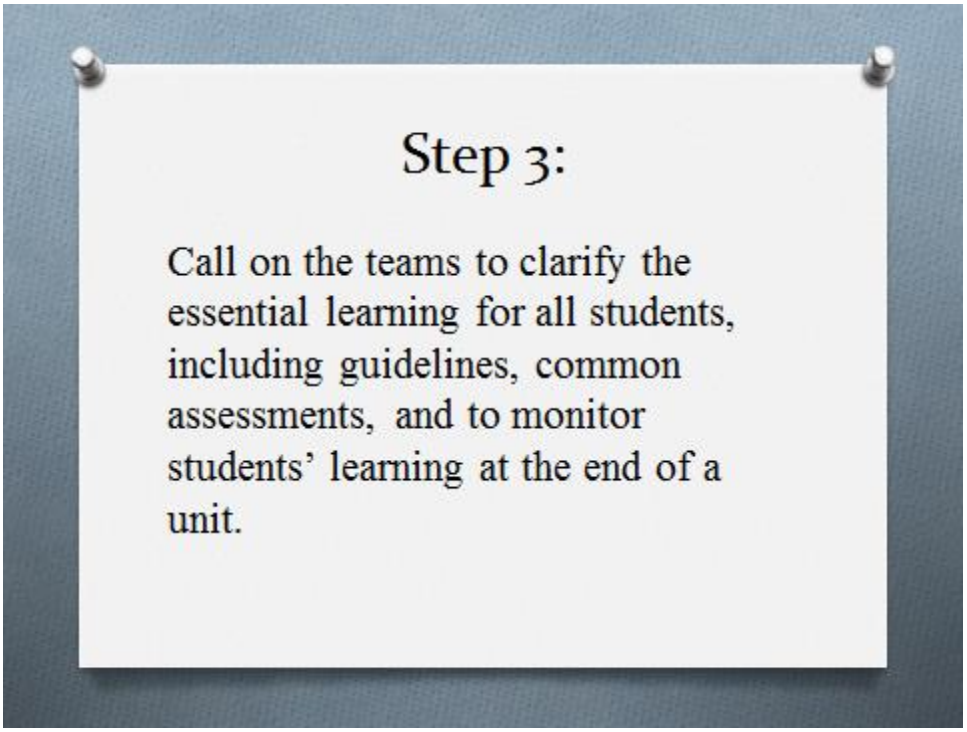
According to DuFour and Mattos (2013), there are five steps that educators can take to form a PLC:

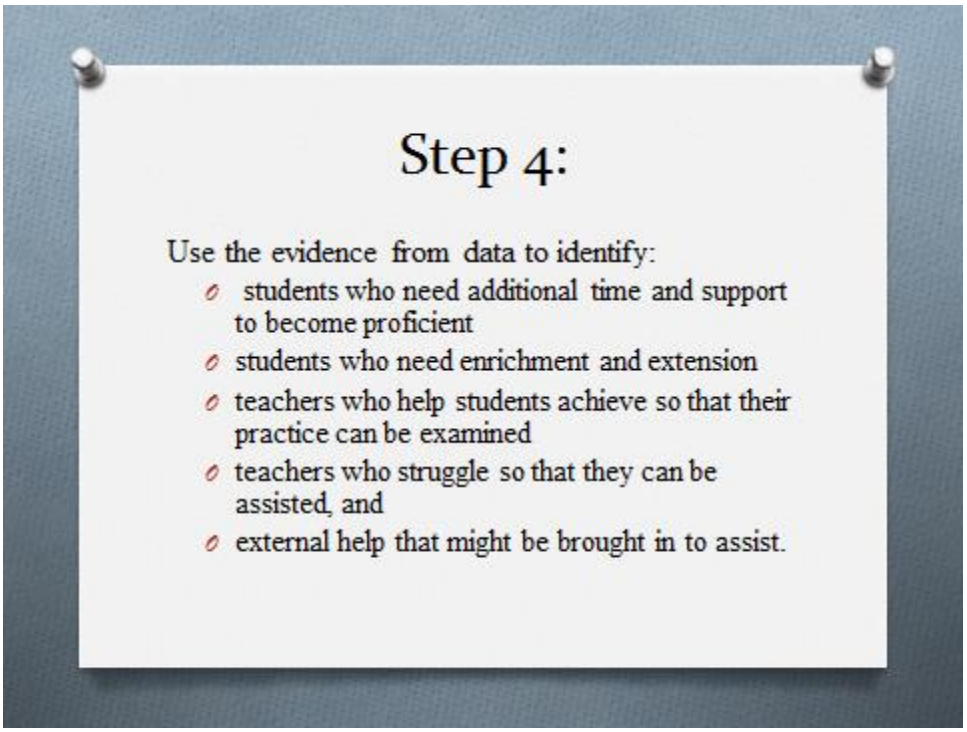
Step 1:

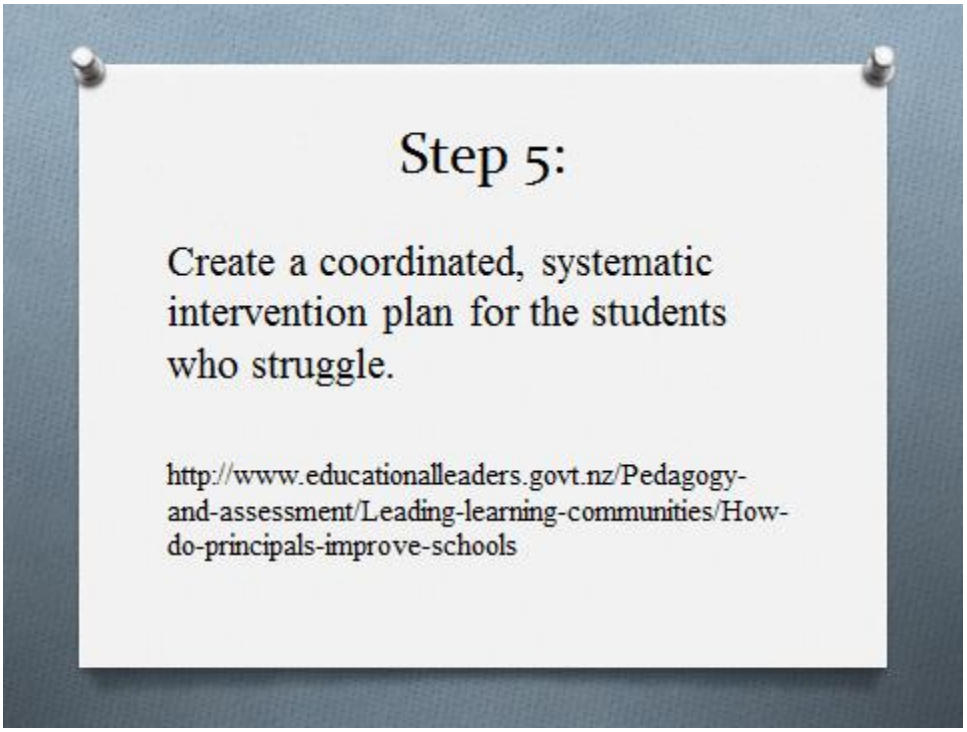
Concentrate on the fundamental purpose of the school, ensuring that all students learn at high levels and that teachers use best practices to bring this about.

*Discuss this with your group. How can we make this happen?


Step 2:
Organize teachers into collaborative teams that take collective responsibility for student learning.
*Discuss with your group—what does your grade level team do now to take collective responsibility for student learning?

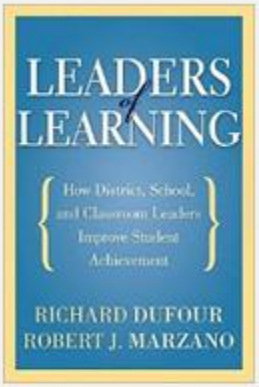

Step 3:
Call on the teams to clarify the essential learning for all students, including guidelines, common assessments, and to monitor students' learning at the end of a unit.


Step 4:
Use the evidence from data to identify:
students who need additional time and support to become proficient
students who need enrichment and extension
teachers who help students achieve so that their practice can be examined
teachers who struggle so that they can be assisted, and
external help that might be brought in to assist.


Step 5:
Create a coordinated, systematic intervention plan for the students who struggle.
http://www.educationalleaders.govt.nz/Pedagogy-and-assessment/Leading-learning-communities/How-do-principals-improve-schools

Book Study

Over the next nine weeks, we will be completing a book study of *Leaders of Learning* by DuFour and Marzano. A study guide will be provided to help facilitate discussions.



Book Study Guide

http://soltreemrls3.s3-website-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/solution-tree.com/media/pdf/study_guides/LOL_Study_Guide.pdf

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DuFour, R., & Marzano, R. (2011). *Leaders of learning: How district, school, and classroom leaders improve student achievement.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Dufour, R., & Mattos, M. (2013). How do principals really improve schools? *Educational Leadership, 70*(7), 34-40. Retrieved from http://www.ascd.org

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Hord, S. (1997). Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. Southwest Educational Development Lab. Retrieved from http://www.sedl.org/

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Saunders, W. M., Goldenberg, C. N., & Gallimore, R. (2009). Increasing achievement by focusing grade-level teams on improving classroom learning: A prospective, quasi-experimental study of Title I schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, *46*(4), 1006-1033. http://aer.sagepub.com/

10:00 Break

10:15 Grade level teams meet in grade level chair's classroom

- As the project developer and facilitator, I will move from room to room and answer any questions or concerns. I may also be needed to provide guidance or modeling. There will also be one member of the administration present in each PLC to help facilitate if needed.

- Work on initial activities, led by grade level chair:

  - Establish norms

    - Each team member will use a post-it note to write one norm. Write 4-5 norms for guiding the PLC meetings. Consider these points:

      - Time—when and where to meet
      - Participation—who will participate and at what level
      - Confidentiality—what is confidential and what happens if confidentiality is broken
      - Speaking—who will speak and what will/will not be discussed
      - Respect—how we will address each other's ideas and what will happen if we don't agree
      - Breaking of norms—what will happen if a member does not adhere to agreed-upon norms

    - Sort your post-it notes on chart paper that is placed around the room, clustering them with others that are similar.
    - Grade level chair will read the notes on each chart, and then work with the group to create a consensus for each norm. Write each norm on a sheet of chart paper and post in the room.
    - One volunteer will type the norms, title them with the PLC grade level, and post on Google Docs for other groups to access.

11:15 PLC group will review the school's beliefs, mission, and vision statements (available on Google Docs). Are we effectively upholding our school's statements? Why or why not? Discuss with the group.

11:45 Lunch

12:45 Return to PLC group in grade level chair's classroom.

- Read "Building Collective Capacity", which is a summary of Chapter 4 in DuFour and Marzano's book *Leaders of Learning: How District,*

School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement. A copy will be provided for each participant but can be accessed from http://tinyurl.com/nrjq2n9.

- Use the Text Rendering Experience Protocol* (National School Reform Faculty, n.d.) to discuss the article.

1:30 Break

1:45 Putting it all together:

- "Birds on a Wire" teamwork video--http://safeshare.tv/w/LWOFsAqIlo

- Use Chalk Talk Protocol* (National School Reform Faculty, n.d.) to answer these questions:

  - How can we encourage and facilitate teamwork?

  - What should happen if there is resistance to collaboration?

  - How can we encourage and support shared leadership in our PLC?

2:45 Wrap-up:

- Review key points from today and agenda for tomorrow
- Write any questions you still have on index cards
- Homework: Read Garmston and Zimmerman (2013) article. Link available on Google Docs.

3:00 Dismiss

Day 2 Professional Learning Session
What are PLCs and Why Do We Need Them?
All grade levels, K-5

Professional Learning Community Session Agenda

8:30 All PLC teams meet in grade level chair's classroom

- Each group will be assisted by myself of a member of the admin team
- Welcome, review purpose and activities for the day
- Review purpose of PLCs (PowerPoint from Day 1)
- Answer questions

9:00 Review norms established on Day 1. Make changes if needed, but norms will be set after today.

9:30 Review Chalk Talk from Day 1 on overcoming resistance.

10:00 Break

10:15 Participants should have read Garmston and Zimmerman (2013) article for homework after Day 1. Use Text Rendering Protocol* to discuss the implications.

11:30 Lunch

12:30 PLC team should decide:

- Leadership roles
- Meeting time and day for first 9 weeks
- Tentative focus for first 9 weeks (if unsure, work with administrator during this meeting for guidance)
- Turn in plan to administration after copying for each PLC member

1:45 Break

2:00 Share observation form to be used on Day 3.

2:30 Wrap-up and final thoughts; form book study groups; review agenda for Day 3

3:00 Dismiss

Day 3 Professional Learning Session
Using What We've Learned About PLCs: Math Focus
All grade levels, K-5
Adapted from McAtee (2014)

Focus: Students will increase achievement in the area of STEM, specifically in Math, as evidenced by the CRCT and benchmark common assessments.

- Current data reflects that in grades 3-5 the results of last year's CRCT math scores include:
    - 26% of our students scored "does not meet"
    - 45% of our students scored "meets"
    - 29% of our students scored "exceeds"

Purpose: Our School Improvement Plan includes a statement that the target goal for next year is that 80% of our students will score "meets or exceeds" ([redacted] County Schools, 2013).

- The target goal is a 6% increase from last year, which is 74% (45/meets+29/exceeds=74). This PLC session will address achieving this target goal.

Goals: By the end of this PLC session, participants will be able to

- disaggregate data from the CRCT and common assessments,
- use the disaggregated data to make instructional decisions,
- utilize a block of time to determine unit plan(s)—current and future—for effective instruction in math, and
- work collaboratively with team members to align curriculum map to math unit 1

Professional Learning Community Session Agenda

8:30 All teaching staff meet in the cafeteria

- Review of purpose and goals

- School Improvement Plan presentation (using Nearpod app—bring your iPad)
    - Math data
    - Attendance rates
    - Discipline statistics
    - The possible root causes for our identified areas of weakness (these are for guidance only—the goal is for the group to come up with a list):

    ➢ Need for more focused instruction based on common assessments and use of data across the grade levels.
    ➢ Need for identifying and supporting at risk students earlier in their school career—not waiting until 3rd grade.
    ➢ Using data and best/promising practices to support and improve math scores.
    ➢ Need for exposing students to experiences not provided at home.

- Instructions for the day

9:30 PLC groups meet in grade level chair's classroom

- Each group will be assisted by a member of the admin team
- Follow Critical Friends Protocols for looking at CRCT and common benchmark assessment data (National School Reform Faculty, n.d.):
    - Data Driven Dialogue Protocol*
    - Chalk Talk Protocol*

10:30 Break

10:45 PLC groups continue

- Determine areas of greatest need from disaggregated data in small groups:
    - Use ATLAS Protocol* (National School Reform Faculty, n.d.)
    - What are we doing well? Where do we need improvement?
    - List standards to focus on—"power" standards

- Align to curriculum map for the first math unit (we will continue this process as part of Professional Learning Communities for each subsequent unit as the year progresses)
    - What resources are needed or can be shared?
        - Apps, websites, research-based strategies?
    - Who has particular strengths or strategies for teaching certain standards?

12:00 Lunch

1:00 Continue in PLC groups

- Wrap up and discuss findings and plans from the morning session
    - Address any issues that are still outstanding

1:30 Observe and participate in math lesson taught by teacher leader from the grade level

- Lesson can be recorded on an iPad and uploaded to the school's secure YouTube channel for future reference
- Lesson will be based on the Common Core [redacted] Standards
- Lesson will demonstrate best practice in following the 7-point lesson plan for the standard, including teacher participation as a student learning the lesson

2:30 Debrief lesson/wrap-up

- What, So What, Now What? Protocol* (National School Reform Faculty, n.d.)
- Copy of alignment plan from earlier session will be made available to teachers
    - Will include standards to cover, remediation and enrichment, resources, and strategies

3:30 Participant survey; dismiss

*Protocols will be accessed from the National School Reform Faculty (n.d.) website and provided for reference.

References

[redacted] County Schools. (2013). *School improvement plan.* Retrieved from http://school.[redacted].org/es/[redacted]/Pages/School-Plan.aspx

Garmston, R. J., & Zimmerman, D. P. (2013). The collaborative compact. *Journal of Staff Development*. Retrieved from http://www.literacyinlearningexchange.org/

[redacted] Department of Education. (2014). *School keys: Unlocking excellence through the [redacted] school standards.* Retrieved from http://www.[redacted].k12.[redacted].us/Portals/[redacted]/District/docs/[redacted]/School%20Keys%204-22-13.pdf

McAtee, C. (2014). *Outline: Professional learning agenda.* Unpublished manuscript, Walden University.

National School Reform Faculty. (n.d.) *Protocols.* Retrieved from http://www.nsrfharmony.org/

Likert survey for teachers who participated in the Effectively Implementing PLCs professional learning sessions. Note: This will be available via Google Docs so that the data can be automatically calculated and graphed.

Please circle your response to the following questions.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

<-------o--------o--------o--------o--------o--------o--------o------->

Strongly Agree — Not Sure — Strongly Disagree

1. This learning opportunity will impact my instructional practices.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

2. This learning opportunity aligns to my school, learning community, and/or district goals.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. This content was relevant and applicable to my instructional setting.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Teachers at a variety of experience levels can benefit from the content presented.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. It was beneficial to work as a grade level team.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. The activities allowed me to use my strengths while learning.

   1. 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. I believe the use of PLCs in our school will provide support to teachers and help raise student achievement.

   1 2 3 4 5 6 7

PLC Observation Form

PLC Observation Form

Name: _____ Date: _____Time:_____

Which PLC did you visit? **Grade/Content**_____

	Place a check by the artifact or activity that was observed.	
	Structure: ☐ Agenda/Minutes form ☐ Norms reviewed ☐ Roles assigned ☐ Set agenda for next meeting ☐ Monthly planning form Comments:	
	Instructional: ☐ XXXX Standards ☐ Learning targets ☐ Review/update common pacing guide/yearly maps ☐ Develop/review SMART goals ☐ Plan and apply interventions and enrichment ☐ Identify/discuss Instructional strategies ☐ Identify/select/discuss differentiated instructional resources Comments:	
	Data: ☐ Develop or revise common formative assessment ☐ Establish results indicators ☐ Calibrate scoring of assessments ☐ Analyze common assessments, data, or student work Comments:	

Successes		
Needs/Concerns		
Questions		

Adapted from Hood River County School District (n.d.) Retrieved from http://www.hoodriver.k12.or.us/

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Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. How many years have you been a classroom teacher? (demographics)
2. Tell me a little bit about yourself and why you wanted to become a teacher (Meister, 2010).
3. How would you describe your school to someone who is not familiar with it (Meister, 2010)?
4. What have been the most positive experiences, if any, during the past year as a Title I teacher?
5. What have been the most negative experiences, if any, during the past year as a Title I teacher?
6. How often (if at all) have you considered transferring to another school during the past year?
7. To what extent do you feel loyal to this school?
8. What opportunities do you have for professional growth?

    Probe:

    a. Do you seek out professional growth opportunities or do you mainly attend those that are mandatory?

9. Research shows that teaching is inherently stressful (Meister, 2010). What kinds of support do you feel you receive as a teacher with ____ years of experience?
10. What kinds of support would you like to receive as a teacher with ____ years of experience?

Probes:

a. For example, would you like:
    i. More training in classroom management
    ii. Training in effectively meeting the needs of students who live in poverty
    iii. More time to meet with colleagues
    iv. More financial compensation
b. How can the school administration provide support if needed?
c. In what ways can your teaching colleagues support you?
d. Describe what it means to have adequate support from the parents of your students.

11. Describe your relationship(s) with your students.

12. How many more years do you plan to continue as a classroom teacher in a Title I school?

Probe:

a. If you are not retiring, what are your plans for when you leave your current position?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D: Reflective Journal Sample

April 7—IRB approval granted

April 8—participant recruitment email sent

April 15—participant recruitment email sent to non-responders

April 20—Interview scheduled with Participant G, but tornado warnings resulted in late school dismissal so interview is rescheduled to May 1st.

April 21—Interview with Participant B. This participant has "one foot out the door" as a transfer has been secured for the next school year. Participant B will be moving to a more affluent school after seven years at the study site.

April 22—Interview completed with Participant D. The participant was very professional and able to separate my two roles as former colleague and researcher. I was very impressed. We talked for about 45 minutes. Participant D readily answered my questions and probes. Participant D gave information that included satisfaction with the level of support given by administration and feeling like there was some difference, but not much, between what teachers at more affluent schools go through as opposed to what teachers at Title I schools go through. Title I teachers have to deal more with understanding the culture their students come from and overcoming a language barrier.

April 23—interview completed with Participant C. Lasted about 45 minutes. As a 20+ year teacher, the main concern for this participant was the lack of equitability in pay and the insult of being called a less effective teacher simply because C has more years.

April 24—Interview with Participant A. The interview took about 40 minutes. Participant A is happier this year because she feels like she has a better handle on things. Participant A is "up and down" because, although there are many frustrations, she prefers to be somewhere where she is known and would not like to "start all over again".

April 27—interview with Participant I. Participant spoke for about an hour. Participant I has very deep feelings about the state of education as well as the different challenges of Title I schools/students.

April 29—interview with Participant H. This was a relatively short interview. My sense was that this participant had, for lack of a better way to put it, "checked out". The participant had been at the school for over a decade and is ready to go someplace "easier". The participant did not elaborate on many answers and seemed confused by some of the questions. An after school fire drill occurred during the interview, so I feel as though I did not get a lot of information.

April 30—interview with Participant E. This participant is one of two of the youngest participants, but E is already ready to pursue another career outside of education. Once E is tenured in the teacher retirement system, E states that she will leave. E worries that school and district leadership, once they leave the classroom, begin to "forget" what it's like for teachers. E says "they don't get it."

May 1—interview with Participant G. This participant was the most hopeful and while G had concerns, she was positive about playing a part in making things better for the students in her care.

May 1—interview with Participant F. This participant was also pretty positive about the impact she is making and although things are not easy, she believes being at a Title I school and working with students who are below grade level allows her to see growth more easily and she is encouraged by that idea. She also, for the most part, likes working with this population.

May 4—interview with participant J. This participant has so many concerns that several times during the interview she had tears in her eyes. She is very weighted down by what she feels is an educational system that is harming her students. She is also ready to go somewhere else that is "easier".

Initial patterns and themes:

- Although all participants say they "didn't get into teaching for the money", the majority agrees that after years of budget cuts and no raises, financial compensation would lessen some of their stress.
- A change of administration this year has exponentially increased their feelings of being supported, but seemingly insurmountable challenges that exist at the school and with the student population sometimes overshadow the support.
- All of the teachers "love" their students and express that they would do anything for them. A common theme among them is to follow up with their students even after the year has passed to make sure they are doing well and on track.
- Many expressed that professional development is "irrelevant" and "generic".
- Too many non-teaching duties that also involve time-consuming data collection that is "never enough".
- Most agree: "we work harder" than those in more affluent schools.