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Teacher and School Administrator Perceptions of their Learning Community

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Donald G. Mulligan

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Walden University
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Abstract

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M.B.A. Wagner College, 1994

B.S. St. Francis College, 1975

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Charter schools are often characterized as professional learning communities (PLCs). However, researchers have noted the importance of self-reflection of school staff related to their role as a PLC because perceptions can influence the effectiveness of achieving the full implementation of a PLC. The purpose of this quantitative study was to explore the perceptions of teachers and administrators at a large New York school district's 2 charter schools concerning their school site as a learning community. This study was grounded in social constructivist leadership theory in order to analyze a professional learning community as the social unit. Research questions examined differences in responses of all participants ($N = 148$) between the 5 scales of the School Professional Staff as Learning Community (SPSaLC) questionnaire as well as differences in responses between administrators ($n = 30$) and teachers ($n = 100$). A repeated-measures ANOVA indicated significant differences in SPSaLC scale scores ($p < .001$) with shared vision, addressed needs, and support learning scores significantly higher than democratic and feedback scores. To examine differences in perceptions between teachers and administrators, a MANOVA revealed significant differences ($p < .001$) indicating that administrators scored shared vision and addresses needs higher than did teachers. The study results may lead to positive social change by providing the local district with initial research findings on the perceptions of school staff related to the 5 major dimensions of a PLC. The district might use these findings to plan for professional development for teachers and administrators to strengthen the implementation of the learning community model at the local site.

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Dedication

To my wife, Patricia Jeanne Mulligan, your daily commitment to teaching has fueled my passion to learn. You have been recognized as a teacher who makes a difference. Thank you for your love, unwavering support, and encouragement and for helping me to understand that the journey is as important as the destination.

To my sons, Timothy Edward Mulligan and Sean Charles Mulligan, and their wives, Lisa and Kristy, thank you for your encouragement, reading support, and being terrific role models for so many children and adults.

To my grandson, Charles Salvatore Mulligan, dream big, raise the bar, and continue to love and learn with all of your heart.

I hope that I make you all as proud of me as I am of you. Love, Grandpa DD.

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Mindful that we are always in God's holy presence I am grateful to have been
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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Leithwood, Patten, and Jantzi (2010) claimed that the absence of a collaborative learning community in schools can leave teachers feeling isolated and perhaps unsupported. This can potentially lead to a negative impact on student performance. Further, Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, and Wallace (2006) suggested that educators' self-perceptions of their school as a professional learning community can impact their effectiveness in the classroom, specifically in the areas of developing and implementing change and achieving desired performance results (Bolam, et al., 2006). Graham-Johnson (2014) further noted that as professional development for teachers in learning communities continues, high expectations for success are addressed, reinforcing the importance of learning together and sharing organizational characteristics in the learning community. Other scholars (DuFour & Matos, 2013; Hardinger, 2013) suggested that as members of the school community reflect on themselves, their self-perceptions as a professional learning community impacts how effective they are at developing and implementing changes in school curriculum and learning practices to achieve desired performance results.

In the local school district the problem reflects what has been described nationally. The School Quality Snapshot given to schools in the district by the New York City Department of Education (NYC DOE, 2015) showed teacher collaboration and school leadership as areas that need improvement. Teachers, administrators, parents, and students indicate that these two areas had consistently lower scores than the others measured.

School leadership and teacher collaboration ratings are key learning community indicators, and ratings for both were shown to be as low as 80% for schools where other ratings were above 90% (NYC DOE, 2015).

Local research regarding the satisfaction of nearly 1 million parents or guardians of students in New York City indicated a high degree of satisfaction with their school connected with student progress (Charbonneau & Van Ryzin, 2012). Yet, in the evaluation of this parent survey by researchers Charbonneau and Van Ryzin, there was evidence of problems in that the overall response rate was only 40%. Further, the researchers found that parent satisfaction may have been influenced by published school performance measures. The measures include the indication of lower scores in the teacher collaboration and school leadership ratings given in the School Quality Snapshot (NYC DOE, 2015). Given the limitations of the survey and school performance measures (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011), parents may be responding more on the basis of their child's performance and not on the performance of the school, further pointing to the need for learning community research at the local school level.

Warner (2014) focused on teacher learning communities being at the heart of a good middle school. Warner referenced the New York City DOE School snapshots similar to those mentioned in this study and made reference to other national studies on the connection of the workings of the learning community with student performance. Warner also indicated that it was the first such study at the school focused on the workings of their learning community, reinforcing the importance of gathering perceptions of their learning community to address improvements in performance (Warner, 2014). To aid in addressing

the local problem, it would be valuable to these schools to have information that brings clarity to how they view themselves as a learning community.

Research (Boone 2010; Horn & Little 2010; Maxwell et al., 2013; Senge, Scharmer, Jaworski, & Flowers, 2004; Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) has been conducted on professional learning communities and the impact that these communities have on administrators, teachers, students, and parents in regards to the development of the entire school community. DuFour and Matos (2013) linked the development of learning communities directly to the improvement of student performance. Conversely, other researchers (Hardinger, 2013; Moolenaar, Sleegers, & Daly, 2012) showed that when teachers and administrators do not view themselves as being members of learning communities, there is a significant negative difference in the quality of the educational experience offered to students. Further, Cranston (2011) indicated the importance of learning communities in the area of building trust amongst teachers and school leaders. Through learning communities, the relationship between teachers and administrators is positively enhanced (Cranston, 2011). Hairon, Goh, and Chua, (2015) revealed that professional learning communities are dependent on how group members collectively work and learn towards sharing goals and improving teaching and learning. Historically, researchers (Hall & Hord, 1987; Hord, 2004; Senge, 1990) have shown that schools that are designed around learning communities have a greater positive impact on student learning, and those schools that accept learning communities on a minimal level merely maintain the status quo. Additional research justifying the need for this study follows with more detailed reference in Section 2.

Problem Statement

As members of the school community reflect on themselves, their self-perception of themselves as a professional learning community impacts how effective they are at developing and implementing changes in school curriculum and learning practices and achieving desired performance results (DuFour & Matos, 2013; Hardinger, 2013; Hord, 2004). Browne (2014) stated that the concept of groups sharing practices linked to the five dimensions of learning communities covered in this study (shared leadership, shared vision, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared practice) have shown positive gains in student performance. Finally, Horn and Little (2010) revealed that formally constructed workplace groups are more likely to prove generative for learning if they develop a capacity for talk that centers on dilemmas and problems of practice.

In New York City, there is a focus on student and school performance. Educational leaders in New York City believe that learning communities will enhance the performance of students. Fryer (2011) reported that annual school report card scores, issued by the New York City Department of Education, hinge on student performance and progress. Researchers (Charbonneau & Van Ryzin, 2012; NYC DOE, 2015) indicated that although some connections are being made between the quality of the school learning environment, no further conclusions can be drawn about how to improve the learning community without first knowing the perceptions of teachers and leaders as members of their learning community. However, no quantitative research has been conducted to determine if teachers and administrators perceive themselves to be effective members of a professional learning community (PLC).

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the five major dimensions of PLCs (dependent variables) and whether the participants were teachers or administrators did or did not perceive themselves as part of a PLC (independent variables). This study analyzed this problem locally for the benefit of those schools partnering in the study and for the shared benefit of other schools in the district and beyond. Hord (1996) monitored schools where there was an evidence of increased student performance and found five themes that they witnessed when monitoring schools where there was an evidence of professional learning communities. They formed the five dimensions measured in their survey. Through the study questions, I used the characteristics of PLCs as defined in the literature to examine participant views on their schools as PLCs.

Nature of the Study

This research study employed a quantitative approach to determine how teachers and administrators of two charter schools in the New York City area view themselves as members of a learning community. In this study, I used the School Professional Staff as Learning Community (SPSaLC) questionnaire (Appendix A). Data collected from the administration of this instrument revealed useful information regarding teacher and administrator views on five major dimensions measured in the survey: (a) administrators democratically sharing power and decision making, (b) shared vision regarding student learning, (c) staff collective learning and application to student need solutions, (d) peer review and feedback, and (e) school conditions to support a learning community. I examined the relationship between the perceptions of teachers and administrators about

their local school site as a learning organization using two independent variables: (a) whether the participants are teachers or administrators and (b) whether the participants do or do not perceive themselves as part of a PLC.

The sample size of teachers was expected to be at least 100, and administrators were expected to be 30. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to generate inferential statistics to examine differences between the dependent survey dimensions and two independent variables focusing on whether the participants are teachers or administrators, and whether or not the participants perceive themselves as being part of a learning community, using an alpha level of .05 to ensure 95% confidence that any significant differences did not occur by chance alone. The SPSaLC uses a 5-point Likert scale on 17 questions within the five dimensions of learning communities. The instrument was used with permission (Appendix B) of the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL). The SPSaLC was administered as a self-directed questionnaire to participants within the two schools. Questionnaire implementation commenced when permission was granted to me by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). More details regarding the validity and reliability of the instrument will be addressed in Section 3.

Research Question, Sub Questions, and Hypotheses

The research question for this study is the following: What are the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding their school as a learning community? Three sub questions and hypotheses were examined throughout the research.

1.　　To what extent are there differences in the level of agreement to all
learning community questions?

$H_0$1:　There are no differences in the level of agreement to all learning community questions within the full sample.

$H_1$1: Participants agree to one or more of the learning community constructs more than the others.

2.　　Are there differences in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators?

$H_0$2: There is no statistical difference in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators.

$H_1$2: There is a statistically significant difference in at least one of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators.

3.　　Are there differences in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a professional learning community?

$H_0$3:　There is no statistically significant difference in at least one of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a professional learning community.

$H_1$3: There is a statistically significant difference in at least one of the five dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a professional learning community.

The research question, subquestions, and hypotheses are discussed in detail within Section 3.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into teacher and administrator perceptions about themselves as members of a learning community. Furthermore, I aimed to determine if there were any differences among the perception scores for each of the five areas addressed in the SPSaLC. The respondents had the opportunity to indicate on the instrument whether their primary function at the school was as an administrator or as a teacher. They were also allowed to indicate whether they do or do not perceive themselves to be a part of a PLC. Study outcomes relative to perspective differences between teachers and administrators may provide a basis for further study or an opportunity to refocus learning community activities focused on improving student performance.

Theoretical Framework

"Education is essentially a social process. This quality is realized to the degree in which individuals form a community group" (p. 58). The theoretical framework for this study informs a process that will "analyze… the social unit" (Merriam, 2002, p. 8), which is defined as a PLC.

Because the study directly involved shared vision and reciprocal learning in a community of practice, I reviewed theoretical frameworks related to PLCs (Bolam et al., 2006; Hord, 2004; Hord & SEDL, 1997; Hunt, 2009). All identified five key dimensions are critical to the success of PLCs. The five dimensions are shared leadership, shared

vision, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared practice. As Hord and the SEDL have conducted many studies regarding PLCs at varied sites, I used the theories of social constructivism in the models for PLCs as discussed by Hord and the SEDL (1996) and Hord (2004). This was similar to other studies on PLCs that are grounded in constructivist leadership theory (Lambert et al., 2002). I employed a quantitative approach to gather information about perceptions within those five dimensions that would ultimately be used to test theories or "measure attitudes" (Creswell, 2013, p. 19) about school learning culture and performance.

Operational Definitions

Communities of practice: The community of practice is defined as a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger et al., 2002; Vaughn & Dornan, 2014). In this study, the group of people included faculty, students, and administration members.

Professional learning community (PLC): For this study, a PLC was defined as a school focused on reciprocal learning where staff members (teachers and administrators) see themselves as a community of learners where the entire school learned together, and all sharing a common vision of what the school should accomplish and what type of environment it should have (Hord, 2004; Little, 2012).

Reciprocal learning: Reciprocal learning, in this study, was defined as the constructive approach that provides for a process of the exchange of ideas enabling

participants in a community to construct meanings that lead toward a shared purpose of schooling (Barker, Wallhead, & Quennerstedt, 2014; Walker, 2002).

Assumptions

My primary assumption was that participants were a representative sample of the populations of teachers and administrators within charter schools throughout the United States. A second assumption was that the two participating charter schools were built on the same premises as other charter schools such as rules for admission and charter approval and renewal being subject to New York State charter school law. Finally, it was assumed that the participants of the participating schools had chosen to participate in the study with the goal of gaining insight into the perceptions they have of their school community as a learning community.

Limitations

A potential limitation for this study was that generalizations may be limited in that only teachers and administrators from charter schools were used as participants. Additionally, only two schools from one school district were investigated. Finally, the study was limited to one instrument, which was restricted to prescriptive variables.

Delimitations

Because there was only one school district within the context of the study, I was confined to the three charter schools within the district, and only two of them agreed to partner in the study. Also, I did not investigate the effects of varied education levels or professional development that teachers and administrators have completed as they were

deemed by partnering schools and IRB to have potentially significant impact on the anonymity of participant surveys.

Significance of the Study

According to Senge (2004), "learning begins when we stop projecting habitual assumptions and start to see reality freshly" (p. 41). The goal of this research was to uncover the perceptions of members of the PLC, but also to extend these findings to the individuals involved in the learning community. Kouzes and Posner (2002) stated that leadership is not all about personality, but practice. I hope that the findings can be shared with those involved with learning communities and that these participants can begin to view themselves as leaders working with others toward continuous improvement. In a broader sense, I believe these findings will enhance others' views of their own learning communities and that other schools might see that the practices of learning communities may be at the core of leading to promote social change.

Reporting the results of the research to the participating schools will give them the opportunity to witness and discuss perceptions and differences that may exist. Further, each school will have their own decisions to make regarding the cost and application of professional development related to learning community practices. Locally and nationally, opportunities exist to impact educational change and enhance learning systems. Creating enhanced learning environments where teachers and students can learn together, leading to performance improvements for both teachers and students, could be of great social significance.

Summary

As members of the school community reflect on themselves, their self-perception as a PLC positively impacts changes in school curriculum and learning practices. Additionally, the absence of a collaborative learning community in schools leaves teachers isolated, potentially negatively impacting student performance. Within the context of this study, no research has been conducted to determine the perceptions of either administration or teachers regarding themselves as part of a learning community. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into their views on this dynamic and significant topic.

In Section 1 of this study, I introduced the concept that learning communities are making a difference in education, which has manifested itself in improved student performance. In Section 2, I further explore the literature on learning communities while Section 3 addresses the intended research design. Section 4 addresses the analyses and results of the study, and Section 5 focuses on conclusions and recommendations for action.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of Section 2 is to review literature on the practices of learning organizations. There are two recurring themes in the literature regarding these practices the importance of learning together and shared organizational characteristics. The content that will be covered in this review includes perspectives on learning and cognition, learning communities, organizational culture, and communities of practice. Researchers have suggested that there should be an understanding of learning and cognition, which leads to understanding what learning communities are and how those communities may practice what they have learned. As research commenced on learning communities and the topics evolved, a basis was formed for strategies used to review literature. Peer-reviewed and research of leading theorists in the areas of learning communities were analyzed. Key terms included, but were not limited to, *change, cognition, organizational culture, development, leadership, learning communities, shared vision,* and *communities of practice.*

The goal of this research was to determine if teachers and administrators of the participating schools perceive themselves as members of a learning community as measured by the five dimensions of PLCs - shared leadership, shared vision, collective learning, supportive conditions, and shared practice (Hord, 1996). The five dimensions served as the dependent variables with the independent variables being whether the participants do or do not perceive themselves as part of a PLC and whether they were teachers or administrators. Those questions were answered by the study participants as a part of the demographic profile page attached to the survey questionnaire.

Over the past 20 years, two surveys have been used to explore the level of PLC implementation: SPSaLC questionnaire (Hord, 1996) and Revised Professional Learning Community Assessment (Olivier & Hipp, 2010). I chose to use the SPSaLC because it has been used to study PLCs and the connection to the major dimensions of effective PLCs as explored in the research of Hord (1996, 2004), DuFour (2004), and others whose work is referenced within the literature. As I also touch on the areas of education reform, teacher development, changes in schools, organizational change, leadership and communities of practice, the literature review also includes the works of Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, and Fernandez (1993); Collins (2001); Darling-Hammond (1996); Hall and Hord (1987); Kouzes and Posner (2002); Senge (1990); Senge et al. (2004); Tomlinson and Imbeau (2010); and Wenger et al. (2002).

Perspectives on Learning and Cognition

Cole, John-Steiner, Scribner, and Souberman (1978) presented insights into the learning process. Cole et al. offered a case for connecting learning and cognition as presented by Vygotsky. Vygotsky viewed learning as a social process, emphasizing dialogue and the varied roles that language plays in instruction and in mediated cognitive growth (as cited in Cole et al., 1978). Socialization in the learning organization is important with "newcomers making the transition from being organizational outsiders to being insiders" (Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, & Truxillo, 2007, p. 707). Perceived organizational support "plays a critical and perhaps more important role than tactics in socializing organizational newcomers" (Perrot, Bauer, Abonneau, Campoy & Erdogan,

2014, p. 267). In this study, I focused on how the PLC sees itself as a whole as addressed by Senge et al (2004):

> All learning integrates thinking and doing. All learning is about how to interact in the world and the types of capacities that develop from our interactions. What differ are the depth of the awareness and the consequent source of action. If awareness never reaches beyond superficial events and current circumstances, actions will be reactions. If, on the other hand, we penetrate more deeply to see the larger wholes that generate 'what is' and our own connection to this wholeness, the source and effectiveness of our actions can change dramatically. (p. 11-12)

Dougherty (2005) conducted a survey to determine the perception of high school principals of themselves as working within PLCs. Dougherty studied the relationship between learning communities and learning achievement at both high and low performing schools. Personnel at the higher performing schools had a greater perception of themselves as working in a learning community. There is further evidence in the literature regarding the impact to students' achievement from both the importance of the role of the principal as leader (Fernet, Guay, Senecal, & Austin, 2012) and high teacher efficacy (Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012).

How members of a community see themselves as professionals may be an important first step toward creating solutions to improve student performance. According to Hargreaves (2003), "if schools are to become real knowledge communities for all students, then teaching must be made into a real learning profession for all teachers" (p. 161). There is further evidence in the literature related to self-perceptions. "When people

who are actually creating a system start to see themselves as the source of their problems; they invariably discover a new capacity to create results they truly desire" (Senge et al., 2004, p. 45). If those results are part of the learning process, Senge et al. (2004) indicated that "learning to see begins when we stop projecting our habitual assumptions and start to see reality freshly" (p. 41).

Schein stated "if you want to understand an organization's culture, go to a meeting" (as cited in Senge et al., 2004, p. 48). To further illustrate this point, Senge indicated that "we can always learn more about organizational culture through careful observation and reflective participation than from reading mission and value statements" (p. 48). Leadership models that focus on genuine learning are "individually and socially constructed by learners who are active observers of the world, and active questioners and active problem posers and solvers" (Gialamos, Pelonis & Medeiros, 2014, p. 73). The organizations that are focused on in this study are otherwise known as learning communities.

Learning Communities

There has been much written in the literature about the characteristics that make PLCs successful. This section will include a review of some of these characteristics as they impact creativity of PLC members (Wheatley, 2007), investment in students (Rocconi (2011), student engagement (Porter, 2011), retention and graduation rates (Pike 2013), and study habits (Leung & Kember, 2013. First, Hord (2004) identified five major characteristics associated with learning communities: (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application of that

learning, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice. These five themes, or dimensions, are the foundation for the 17 question in the School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire. The five dimensions are interrelated. Hord indicated that these dimensions are not isolated, but are intertwined in a variety of ways.

A Nation at Risk identified problems in the teaching profession ranging from "poorly qualified teachers to poor pre-service training as contributing to a crisis in the education of children" (Hord, 2004, p. 5). Astuto et al. (1993) proposed three related communities: (a) the professional community of educators, (b) learning communities of teachers and students both within and outside the classroom, and (c) the stakeholder community. The goal of these communities is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the students' benefit (Astuto et al., 1993). According to Hord (1997), this arrangement may also be referred to as communities of continuous inquiry and improvement. Hord (1997) indicated that organizations do not change, but individuals do. Individuals must act on what they have learned as schools are now expected not only to offer education, but to ensure learning (Darling-Hammond, 1996). While teacher effectiveness in the learning community has been studied, there is also a call to explore how well teachers understand the content in which they teach (Bausmith & Barry, 2011). In classrooms, learning may happen best "within an environment in which each student comes to understand, own, and value his or her capacity as a learner" (Tomlinson & Imbeau, 2010, p. 77). Senge (1990) suggested that performing for someone else's approval, rather than learning to be more adaptable and to generate creative solutions to problems, can create the conditions that ensure mediocre performance. Wheatley (2007)

offered that when organizations use control mechanisms with their employees, people become stagnant and good work is not the product. Additionally, Hord (2004) found that when trust is not reflected in employees, their creativity is hindered and problems go unaddressed.

At the college level, researchers (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Rocconi, 2011) have shown that student engagement is a primary incentive in the retention of first-year students. When students and faculty within well-established learning communities work together, students can achieve higher grades and more meaningful tenures at the school. The National Survey of Student Engagement showed that the highest scores for students' opinions regarding their success in the areas of retention and graduation were linked to student support systems (Pike, 2013). Leung and Kember (2013) suggested that first-year college students may not have the study habits necessary to be compatible with higher education goals. To assist with this problem, researchers referenced learning communities as a means of addressing the problem (Leung & Kember, 2013). When a student is involved with learning communities, effective learning is more likely to occur.

Shared Vision

A critical attribute of PLCs is a commitment to shared vision and values (Kouzes & Posner, 2009; Maxwell et al., 2013; Thoonan, Sleegers, Oort, Peetsma, & Geijsel, 2011; Van Dierendonck, 2011). Senge (1990) found that a shared learning vision is essential in having an effective learning community. Additionally, Senge stated that a shared vision is more than an idea. Instead, it is a force in people's hearts, as well as a commitment to one

another. Boyatzis, Rochford, and Taylor (2015) revealed that when there is an indication

of optimism associated with personal and shared vision, there were lower health issues.

The concept of having a shared vision is prevalent in the literature in regards to multiple

subjects. Hallinger and Heck (2010) referenced the impact of a shared vision and

collaboration on improvement in math scores. Melnyk and Davison (2009) revealed that

participants in a study involving nursing students showed increases in academic

performance. Melnyk and Davison found that a shared vision concept helps to establish a

clear vision for innovation and inspiration.

The notion that "belief in and enthusiasm for the vision were the sparks that

ignited the flame of inspiration" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 18.) reinforces the

significance of reciprocal learning concept as connected with shared vision. Additionally,

personal vision may be an important part of shared vision. O'Brien observed that "my

vision is not what's important to you. The only vision that motivates you is your vision"

(as cited in Senge, 1990, p. 211). Senge (1990) indicated that "personal vision comes from

within" (p. 147). According to Hord (2004), the level of shared leadership achieved is

dependent upon the principal's willingness to share authority and his or her ability to

motivate teachers to take on new responsibilities. Thoonan et al. (2011) showed that when

principals do not involve teachers in the school building process, then teachers do not feel

responsible for formulating and developing a school vision. This attitude can prevent

teachers from staying current in their field and can serve as a detriment to their morale.

Shared vision is important in companies as well. Collins (2001) stated that

effective management teams consist of people who challenge one another, yet come

together on decisions. Kouzes and Posner (2009) indicated that in ongoing surveys of thousands of global workers, 72% wanted a leader who was forward thinking. Valentine (2014) revealed that when this concept is applied to education, commitment to a shared vision may take on an even greater moral purpose as teachers and administrators act to impact student learning and make a difference in their lives.

Organizational Culture and Communities of Practice

There is difference in the quality of the educational experience offered to students. Hord (2004) stated that schools led by administration that continually redesign themselves and seek new ways to increase the effectiveness of their work will have improved student learning. Conversely, school administrators who are reluctant to change will remain status quo schools (Hord, 2004). Senge (1990) stated "organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning. But without it, no organizational learning occurs" (p. 139). Additionally, Senge found that a personal vision comes from the individual and that observation and reflection are the most effective means of growing a community of good practice. Sarros, Cooper, and Santoro (2011) demonstrated the strength of the relationship between vision and school culture. Motivation for change is enhanced through the creation of a competitive culture, which is promoted and managed by school leaders (Sarros et al., 2011). Kouzes and Posner (2002) listed five practices of exemplary leadership: model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. While leadership is about personality, it is also about practice and that credibility is the foundation of good leadership (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

The concept of learning communities began in the business sector regarding an organization's capacity to learn (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Over time, this concept was embraced by the educational community and evolved from that of a learning organization to that of a learning community focused on collaborative work culture for teachers. Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) found that educators became interested in the idea that schools should be about adult learning, as well as student learning. DuFour and Mattos (2013) revealed that school principals should lead efforts to collectively monitor student achievement through PLCs, not by micromanaging them.

Over time, research on school leadership has typically focused on the role of the school principal as the leader. That perspective is an outgrowth of the principal's management to the school's governance and the cultural inclination to associate leadership with a formal administrative role (Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982). Continuing through the 1980s, theories evolved to address changing the school's culture as a means of improving outcomes. Hence, the leaders in schools developed conditions that support school improvement by means other than direct intervention of the principal.

Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2001) indicated that in the most effective schools, every member of the educational community has the responsibility and authority to take leadership roles. As such, the definition of a school leader has been rethought, encompassing the whole of all parts of school life including administrators, teachers, other staff members, parents, and other members of the education community. Further, Spillane et al. posed that it is not one person's responsibility to ensure success or failure

of students, but rather the organization structure and a redefinition of ways people are expected to work together and the practices they engage in.

The concept of leadership and learning as practices is explored in the literature in describing learning communities as communities of practice. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) stated, "communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (p. 4). "However they accumulate knowledge, they become informally bound by the value that they find in learning together" (2002, p. 5). The community is not exclusive, but rather includes members of "various standing in terms of experience, expertise, age, personality, authority within the organization" (Roberts, 2006, p. 627). In further describing communities of practice, there is an indication that they "do not reduce knowledge to an object. They make it an integral part of their activities and interactions, and they serve as a living repository for that knowledge (Roberts, 2006, p. 627).Wenger et al. stated that "sharing tacit knowledge requires interaction and informal learning processes such as storytelling, conversation, coaching, and apprenticeship of the kind that communities of practice provide…communities of practice are in the best position to codify knowledge because they can combine its tacit and explicit aspects" (p. 9). Wegner (2010) indicated that communities of practice are of course not isolated; they are part of broader social systems that involve other communities. Knowledge management has also been studied in firms around the world. Jeon, Kim, and Koh (2011) also tied four factors into knowledge sharing activities. When "perceived consequences, affect, social factors, and facilitating

conditions" are present, they significantly impact knowledge sharing in communities of practice" (Jeon et al., 2011, p 12423).

Participation in communities of practice and cultivation of communities of practice were explored by Wenger et al. (2002). Wenger et al. stated, "Controversy is part of what makes a community vital, effective and productive… it is by participating in these communities - even when going against mainstream - that members produce scientific knowledge" and that "knowledge is not static. It is continually in motion" (p. 10). Regarding cultivating communities of practice "their health depends primarily on the voluntary engagement of their members and on the emergence of internal leadership" (Wenger, 2002, p. 12).

In designing communities of practice, Wenger et al. has "derived seven principles: design for evolution, open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives, invite different levels of participation, develop both public and private community spaces, focus on value, combine familiarity and excitement, and create a rhythm for the community. These design principals are not recipes, but rather embody our understanding of how elements of design work together" (2002, p. 51).

In much the same way that shared values are critical to the success of the learning community, a shared domain "creates a sense of accountability to a body of knowledge and therefore the development of practice" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 31). "What guides the actual learning of the community is an insider's view of the domain. This view may or may not be easily articulated by members, and it may not always align with the organization, but it nevertheless shapes knowledge, values, and behaviors to which they

hold each other accountable" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 31). Wenger states further that "a domain is not an abstract area of interest, but consists of key issues or problems that members commonly experience" and that "the most successful communities of practice thrive where the goals and needs of an organization intersect with the passions and aspirations of participants" (2002, p. 32).

Methodology Insights

This research study examined the relationship between perceptions of the learning community and current status as teacher or administrator, and whether participants consider themselves members of a learning community. I used a questionnaire with the intent of generalizing to a larger population (Babbie, 1990). I was interested in the opinions of approximately 100 teachers and administrators who work in charter school environments within one school district. The *School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire* (SPSaLCQ) was used for this study. It is used to collect quantitative data from the respondents regarding their perceptions of themselves as members of a professional learning community. As such, this study a quantitative approach to gather information about perceptions that will ultimately be used to test theories or "measure attitudes" (Creswell, 2013, p.19).

Over the past 20 years there are two surveys that appear to have been used widely to explore a schools level of PLC implementation. One is the *School Professional Staff as Learning Community (SPSaLC)* questionnaire (Hord, 1996). The other is the *Revised Professional Learning Community Assessment (PLCA-R)* (Olivier & Hipp, 2010). Both have been used in quantitative research studies to explore the relationship to dependent

and independent variables. The researcher chose to use *SPSaLC* because of the extent to which it has been used in the study of PLCs and the connection to the major dimensions of effective PLCs as explored in the research of Hord (1996, 2004), DuFour (2004), and others whose work is referenced in this literature review section.

Examples of other quantitative research studies that have used *SPSaLC* to examine PLCs include a University of Nebraska study by Sandra Gaspar (2010), and two recent Walden University dissertations (Hardinger, 2013; Terry, 2009). An example of a mixed-method research study using the *SPSaLC* at Walden University is the Shawn Boone (2010) study focused on *Professional Learning Communities' Impact: A Case Study Investigating Teachers' Perceptions and Professional Learning Satisfaction at One Urban Middle School.* The researcher believes that Boone's use of the research approach was appropriate as there had already been evidence that PLCs had been implemented and were not effective. The quantitative data was used to explore effectiveness results in the five dependent variable dimensions of the *SPSaLC.* The qualitative research was needed in the Boone (2010) study as the problem of the study needed to address why the implementation was not effective, necessitating dialog with participants.

The problem of this study is that there is no evidence that PLCs have been formally implemented in any of the schools participating in the study or that any research has been done to explore the self-perceptions of the teachers and administrators of these schools related to the five dimensions of effective PLCs. As such, given the references cited relative to the use of this approach in similar studies, the researcher decided to take a quantitative approach for the study.

Responses to research questions posed in the study may "stimulate new ways of thinking" (DeRue, 2011) about how we define and study leadership and learning. Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) will be used for the first research question in the study as it is the appropriate analysis to conduct when the goal is to assess for statistical differences in several dependent variables that all share similarities (Howell, 2010). Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be used on the other two research questions as the full set of dependent variables are being assessed for two independent variables. The researcher found the MANOVA a more appropriate measure than a multivariate analysis of co-variance (MANCOVA) as used in the Hardinger (2013) study where the study was more conducive to testing all three hypotheses in one step.

Summary

In Summary, the literature review in Section 2 explored literature on PLCs and the five key characteristics of PLCs with a particular focus on shared vision and communities of practice.

When they began their Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry (CCCII) project, Shirley Hord and the SEDL categorized the key characteristics of professional learning communities into five themes: supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions and shared practice. The literature shows that for PLCs to be effective, a broad commitment is necessary. This requires shared vision and nurturing of all community members if the whole organization is to be effective.

Communities of practice are concerned with the whole, and they may "share concerns, a set of problems, or a passion" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). That which is shared is a product of the communities tacit knowledge and the passion that they feel in their hearts. "In cultures around the world, when people want to indicate a point that has deep meaning to them, they gesture toward their heart…the oldest Chinese symbol for 'mind' is a drawing of the heart. It may well be that 'seeing with the heart' not only is more than a metaphor but is exactly what lies behind the extension of awareness that characterizes seeing from the whole" (Senge et al., 2004, p. 55).

Methodology Section 3 will address the method that was used to complete this study including how data was captured. The Methodology section discusses in detail the hypotheses, research questions, sample, instrumentation and validity, and role of the researcher.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into middle and high school teachers' and administrators' views of themselves as members of a learning community. Within this section, the methodology of the study is introduced and justified with the presentation of the research questions, sample population, role of the researcher, instrumentation, and data collection and analysis. In the state of New York, student and school performance is measured by the Annual New York State Department of Education (DOE) School Report Cards. Information collected from this study was used to further study the relationship between learning community attributes and student performance.

Research Design

The SPSaLC was used to test the null hypotheses. The SPSaLC has been used in many other studies regarding PLCs, including dissertations completed by doctoral students at Walden University. License (Appendix B) was granted by the SEDL for use in this study. The questionnaire is designed to collect data from respondents regarding their perceptions of themselves as members of a PLC. According to Creswell (2013), this quantitative approach is the best means for testing theories and measuring attitudes. I selected the SPSaLC because it has been used in the study of PLCs and the connection to the major dimensions of effective PLCs in the research of Hord (1996, 2004) and DuFour (2004). PLCs had not been formally implemented in any of the schools participating in the study. Additionally, no research had been done to explore the perceptions of the teachers and administrators at these schools, much less any exploration related to the five dimensions of effective PLCs.

Research Question, Sub Questions, and Hypotheses

The research question in this study was the following: What are the perceptions of

teachers and administrators regarding the local school site as a learning community?

Guided by the research question, there are three subquestions and hypotheses that were

examined:

1. To what extent are there differences in the level of agreement to all

learning community questions?

$H_0 1$: There are no differences in the level of agreement to all learning community

questions within the full sample.

$H_1 1$: Participants agree to one or more of the learning community constructs more

than the others.

To examine Research Question 1, a repeated-measures ANOVA was conducted to

examine for differences in each of the five sections regarding the learning community.

According to Howell (2010), a repeated-measures ANOVA is the appropriate analysis to

conduct when the goal is to assess statistical differences in several dependent variables

that all share similarities (Howell, 2010). The means of each of the five groups of

questions were compared to one another to assess significant differences in the level of

agreement. This assessment showed which areas have the highest and lowest levels of

agreement amongst the staff. If significance was found in the ANOVA, post hoc pairwise

comparisons were conducted to assess which of the five groups of questions were

significantly higher or lower than each other (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Thus, I

determined if there were one or more groups of questions that participants responded to

differently than the others. An alpha level of .05 was used to determine significance; this

allows the researcher 95% confidence that any statistically different measures do not occur

by chance. Prior to analysis, the assumptions of the repeated measures ANOVA were

assessed. Conducting the repeated measures ANOVA ensures that data on each dependent

variable are normally distributed and that the variability in responses are similar for each

measure. Normality is the assumption that each variable is normally distributed and was

assessed using a one sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for each dependent variable

(Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012).

2.   Are there differences in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC

between teachers and administrators?

$H_0 2$: There is no statistical difference in any of the five major dimensions of the

SPSaLC between teachers and administrators.

$H_1 2$: There is a statistically significant difference in at least one of the five major

dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators.

To examine Research Question 2, a MANOVA was conducted. The MANOVA

created a linear combination of the dependent variables for a grand mean used to assess

whether or not there were group differences on the full set of dependent variables. In this

analysis, the dependent variables were the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC. The

independent variable was whether a participant was a teacher or administrator. This

nominal variable had two levels and was dichotomous. In this analysis, I determined

whether the two groups differed in one or more of the dependent variables. Because

differences were suggested, pairwise comparisons were used in the form of ANOVAs to

determine where these differences lie (i.e., which of the five major dimensions). An alpha

level of .05 was used in this analysis to ensure 95% confidence that any significant

differences do not occur by chance alone.

     3.   Are there differences in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC

          between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a

          professional learning community?

$H_0 3$: There is no statistically significant difference in at least one of the five major

dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as

part of a professional learning community.

$H_1 3$: There is a statistically significant difference in at least one of the five

dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as

part of a PLC.

To examine Research Question 3, a second MANOVA was conducted. In this

analysis, the dependent variables were the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC. The

independent variable was whether a participant does or does not consider themselves a

part of a PLC. This was a nominal variable with two levels and was dichotomous. In this

analysis, I determined whether the two groups differed on one or more of the dependent

variables. As differences were suggested, pairwise comparisons were used in the form of

ANOVAs to determine where these differences lie. An alpha level of .05 was used in this

analysis.

Setting and Sample

The population for this study was 100 New York state-certified teachers and 30 school administrators/leaders. All participants were working at one of the two charter schools within the school district under investigation. One school has both a middle school and high school. The other school is a middle school considering a charter amendment to expand to include high school grades. The schools selected for this study were chosen as they share common elements: (a) newly chartered and operated within the same school district and (b) high population of students from families at or below the poverty level. Enrollment at each school varied from 300 – 440 during the study timeframe.

A sufficient sample size for each analysis was calculated using G*Power. Using a medium effect size, alpha level of .05, and power of .80, the repeated measures ANOVA required 21 participants using similar parameters. Therefore, more than 200 prospective participants were gathered in order to obtain a large enough sample size to find significance (Faul, Erdfelder, Buchner, & Lang, 2009).

Instrumentation and Validity

The SPSaLC was used as the means of collecting data for this study. The SPSaLC consists of 17 questions that are grouped into five major dimensions of a PLC. The questionnaire provided quantitative data regarding the participants' perceptions of their school as a learning community. The complete instrument package included (a) cover letter (Appendix C) and (b) demographic information page and (c) a copy of the SPSaLC questionnaire (Appendix D). The quantitative validity of the survey was reinforced by

using descriptive statistics and ANOVA as a repeated measure. The "important advantage of the repeated measures design is that it removes or reduces individual differences, which in turn lowers sample variability and tends to increase the chances for obtaining a significant result" (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2005, p. 290).

Data Collection

To maximize the response rate, the questionnaire was distributed at a participant recruitment meeting held at each of the partnering schools to all school administrators and teachers within the context of the study. I gave each participant recruit a self-addressed stamped envelope for postal return directly to me. On receipt of the anonymous surveys, I assigned a participant code to each survey and made a back-up hard copy of each of the surveys received. The surveys were scanned and saved in pdf files as secondary backup.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics and frequency distributions were conducted to determine that responses were within possible range of values and that the data were not distorted by outliers. To account for the presence of outliers, data were tested by the examination of standardized value. Standardized values were created for each subscale score and cases were examined for values that fall above 3.29 and values that fall below -3.29 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). Data were entered into SPSS version 20.0 for Windows (IBM, 2011). Inferential, descriptive statistics were conducted to describe the sample demographics and the research variables used in the analysis. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for nominal data. Means and standard deviations were calculated for continuous data.

Participants' Rights

The study participants were provided a consent form (Appendix C) which indicated the purpose of the study, why they were selected, and my background. The participants were also informed that their participation was voluntary and their input would remain confidential. Risks and benefits of the study were also articulated during consent. Participants received contact information for me, dissertation chair, and the Walden University Research Participant Advocate should they have had any questions or concerns.

Role of the Researcher

I worked at one of the schools participating in the study and continue to have a positive working relationship with many teachers and administrators within the partnering schools. However, no one involved in the study had ever reported directly to me. Data collection was facilitated directly from the participant to me and all submitted questionnaires were coded, without names, to ensure anonymity. Finally, prior to the data collection process, I completed the training for the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research and received approval from the Walden University IRB.

Summary

If the five dimensions of a PLC are implemented within a school environment, a positive impact on student performance can be achieved. In Section 4 of this study, I will present findings demonstrating the relationship between the five PLC dimensions and the school member's perceptions of these dimensions within the context of two partnering schools.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Collective efficacy between teachers and administrators is important in the formation of a strong social network within the school and can ultimately lead to positive student achievement (Moolenaar, Sleegers, & Daly, 2012). Despite the literature endorsing learning communities, the two charter schools within the confines of this study have conducted no formal investigation to determine the views of their administration and staff regarding their work environment as a productive learning community. I examined the social network within the two sampled charter schools to determine how perceptions of the learning community differ between teachers and administrators.

Pre Analysis Data Cleaning

I collected responses from 155 participants. Prior to conducting the analyses, the data were checked for missing values and univariate outliers. One participant was removed for not responding to more than half of the survey. Outliers were assessed by examining the standardized values of the subscores, and any value greater than 3.29 or less than -3.29 were removed as outliers. One outlier was removed for shares vision scores, three outliers were removed for feedback scores, and two outliers were removed for support learning. Examples of outliers from these participants included questions skewed with scores lower than -3.29, indicating that score for those questions significantly less than standardized values. Therefore the final analysis was conducted on 148 participants.

Demographic Information

Of the 148 participants, 89 were from School A (60%) and 59 were from School B (40%). Sixty-eight percent of the participants reported teaching as their primary responsibility (100, 68%), and 20% of the participants stated that administrative or leadership was their primary responsibility ($n = 29$). The frequencies and percentages of the demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Frequencies and Percentages of Demographics

Demographic	n	%
School Code		
A	89	60
B	59	40
Primary Responsibility		
Teaching	100	68
Administrative/Leadership	29	20
Other Support Staff	18	12
No Response	1	1

Note. Due to rounding, percentages may not sum to 100%.

Descriptive Statistics

Participants' democratic scores ranged from 2.50 to 5.00, with $M = 4.10$ and $SD = 0.65$. The shares visions scores ranged from 3.00 to 5.00, with $M = 4.39$ and $SD = 0.44$. The addresses needs scores ranged from 3.00 to 5.00, with $M = 4.35$ and $SD = 0.44$. The feedback scores ranged from 2.00 to 5.00, with $M = 4.03$ and $SD = 0.64$. The support learning scores ranged from 3.00 to 5.00, with $M = 4.22$ and $SD = 0.40$. The means and standard deviations of the continuous variables are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Continuous Variables

Continuous Variables	*Min.*	*Max.*	*M*	*SD*
Democratic (shared leadership)	2.50	5.00	4.10	0.65
Shares Visions	3.00	5.00	4.39	0.44
Addresses Needs (collective learning)	3.00	5.00	4.35	0.44
Feedback (shared practice)	2.00	5.00	4.03	0.64
Support Learning	3.00	5.00	4.22	0.40

Detailed Analysis

Research Question One

To what extent are there differences in the level of agreement to all learning community questions?

$H_0 1$: There are no differences in the level of agreement to all learning community questions within the full sample.

$H_1 1$: Participants agree to one or more of the learning community constructs more than the others.

To examine Research Question 1, an ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were significant differences among democratic, shared vision, addresses needs, feedback, and support learning scores. Prior to conducting the ANOVA, the assumption of normality on all of the dependent variables was assessed using five Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. The results for all five dependent variables were found to be significant ($p < .001$); however, as the data set is large (greater than 30 observations) normality may be assumed (Stevens, 2009).

Prior to assessing the ANOVA, the assumption of sphericity (Mauchely, 1940) was assessed and was found to be significant, $\chi^2(9) = 77.61$, $p < .001$, meaning that it was violated. Due to the violation, the Greenhouse-Geisser statistic was reported with the intention of correcting for this potential harm (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2012). The result of the test of within subjects effects was significant, $F(3.31, 14.50) = 21.27$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .13$. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternative. The results of the repeated measures ANOVA are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Within Subjects Effects for Differences on Perceptions of Learning Community

Source	SS	MS	$F(3.31, 14.50)$	p	Partial η^2
Within subjects	14.50	4.49	21.27	< .001	.13
Error	100.21	0.21			

Note. F values reported are Greenhouse-Geisser.

As the repeated measures ANOVA was found to be significant, post hoc pairwise comparisons were conducted to assess which of the five groups were significantly higher or lower than one another. Shared vision scores ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.44$) were significantly higher than democratic scores ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.65$), as well as feedback scores ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.64$) and support learning scores ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.40$). Addresses needs scores ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.44$) were significantly higher than democratic scores ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.65$), as well as feedback scores ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.64$) and support learning scores ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 0.51$). Support learning scores ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 0.40$) were significantly higher than both democratic scores ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.65$) and feedback scores ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 0.64$). The means and standard deviations of the scores can be found in Table 2.

Research Question Two

Are there differences in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators?

$H_0 2$: There is no statistical difference in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators.

$H_1 2$: There is a statistically significant difference in at least one of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators.

To address Research Question 2, I used a MANOVA to assess if statistical differences in scores of the SPSaLC existed between teachers and administrators. Prior to the analysis, the assumptions of normality were assessed. Normality was assessed on all dependent variables (the five subscores of SPSaLC) using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The test suggested significance in all subscores ($p < .001$), such that the assumption of normality was not met. However, as the data set is large (greater than 30 observations), the data can be considered normal (Stevens, 2009).

The results of the MANOVA were significant, $F(5, 123) = 5.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .17$, suggesting that there were significant differences in the five dependent variables by primary responsibility. Because there was a significant result for the MANOVA, individual ANOVAs were conducted to determine where these difference lie. There were significant differences between primary roles in scores for shares visions ($F(1,127) = 17.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$), addresses needs ($F(1,127) = 4.05$, $p = .046$, $\eta^2 = .03$), and feedback ($F(1,127) = 12.65$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .09$). The shared vision scores mean was

greater for administration/leadership ($M = 4.70$, $SD = 0.33$) than for teaching ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.43$). The addresses needs scores' means were greater for administration/leadership ($M = 4.51$, $SD = 0.32$) than for teaching ($M = 4.33$, $SD = 0.47$). The feedback scores were greater for the administration/leadership ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.63$) than for the teaching ($M = 3.91$, $SD = 0.60$). Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternative, which states that there is a statistically significant difference in at least one of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators. The results of the MANOVA and ANOVAs are presented in Table 4.

Table 4

MANOVA on Leadership Effectiveness by Leader Type

Source	MANOVA $F(5,123)$	ANOVA $F(1,127)$				
		D[a]	SV[b]	AN[c]	F[d]	SL[e]
Primary Responsibility	5.00***	2.05	17.58***	4.05*	12.65**	1.66

Note. * $p < .050$. **$p < .010$, ***$p < .001$. Otherwise $p > .050$. D = democratic, SV = shares values, AN = addresses needs, F = feedback, SL = support learning.
[a]$F(1,127) = 2.05$, $p = .155$, $\eta^2 = 0.02$
[b]$F(1,127) = 17.58$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.12$
[c]$F(1,127) = 4.05$, $p = .046$, $\eta^2 = 0.03$
[d]$F(1,127) = 12.65$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = 0.09$
[e]$F(1,127) = 1.66$, $p = .201$, $\eta^2 = 0.01$

Research Question Three

Are there differences in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a PLC?

$H_0 3$: There is no statistically significant difference in at least one of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a PLC.

$H_1$3: There is a statistically significant difference in at least one of the five dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a PLC.

I used a second MANOVA to address Research Question 3. The dependent variables were the five major dimensions with the independent variable of whether the participant did or did not consider him or herself a part of a PLC. However, the nature of the sample responses did not allow for the analysis to be conducted because all of the participants identified as being a part of a PLC, and there was no group variability to analyze. This is an artefact of the sample's perceptions and cannot be amended using the naturally gathered data. Thus the third research question could not be assessed using these survey responses.

Summary

In Section 4, I presented a restatement of the problem and preanalysis data cleaning prior to conducting the analyses. Demographic information and descriptive statistics were presented prior to assessing the research questions. A detailed analysis of each research question was presented individually with the suggestion of whether or not to reject the null hypothesis. Analysis of Research Question 1 included one repeated measure ANOVA, which indicated that there were significant differences between the scores for each of the five perceptions of learning community scores. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons suggested that participants tended to have higher scores on shares values, addressed needs, and support learning scores than on democratic or feedback perceptions scores. This can

be interpreted to mean that participants from both sites perceived that feedback was poorly addressed or that there was a lack of democratic structure in their school.

Analysis of Research Question 2 was conducted using a MANOVA, which indicated that there were significant differences in perceptions of the learning community between administration and leadership versus teachers. Univariate analyses indicated that administration and leadership viewed shares values, addresses needs, and feedback as being better represented in the two schools than did teachers or staff. These results highlight a discrepancy between these perceptions between the two different groups of school employees. These results will be discussed in Section 5 in reference to prior literature. In addition to the discussion of these results, Section 5 will include potential limitations to the present study and suggestions to future research that may be useful to remedying these limitations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Study Overview

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into school staff members' perceptions about themselves as a PLC. The problem this study addressed was the relationship between the dependent variables, the perceptions of school staff determined by the SPSaLC survey instrument (Appendix D), and the independent variables, teacher participant, administrative/leader participant, identification or nonidentification as member of a PLC. There were three research questions addressed in the study: To what extent are there differences in the level of agreement to all learning community questions? Are there differences in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators? Are there differences in any of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a PLC?

The participants in the study were teachers, leaders, and staff in two public charter schools with students in Grades 6-12. There were 155 respondents from the 214 participants recruited. After conducting preanalysis data cleaning, checking for missing values and univariate outliers, seven were removed. The final analysis was conducted on 148 participants. Sixty-eight percent of the participants reported teaching as their primary responsibility, and 20% of the participants stated administrative or leadership as their primary responsibility. All of the study participants identified themselves as members of a PLC. I also assessed other independent variables such as gender, time in position, and level of education achieved; Use of those variables was abandoned after consultation with the IRB and leaders at the two partnering schools yielded concerns about achieving survey

anonymity goals. While analysis of those independent variables was not viable for this study, it is something that might be recommended for future studies.

To analyze the results of the survey, two statistical tests were performed. An ANOVA was conducted to determine if there were significant differences in mean and standard deviation among the democratic, shared vision, addresses needs, feedback, and support learning scores. A MANOVA was conducted to assess if statistical differences in scores of the SPSaLC exist between teachers and administrators. The 100% response rate to the "members of a learning community" variable question did not allow for the proposal to conduct a second MANOVA to assess differences in the five major dimensions between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a learning community.

Discussion and Interpretation of Findings

In the first research question, I examined the extent to which there are differences in the level of agreement to all learning community questions. The ANOVA results conducted for Research Question 1 indicated that there were significant differences ($p <$ .001) among the dependent variable scores. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternative. Comparative tests assessing which of the five groups had significant differences indicated that all had mean scores higher than 4 on the 5-point Likert scale measurement used in the survey instrument. There were two significant results found in the pairwise comparisons: significantly higher mean scores for three of the five groups measured and significantly higher standard deviations for the two groups with the lower scores. Shared vision ($M = 4.39$, $SD = 0.44$), addressed needs ($M = 4.35$, $SD =$

0.44), and support learning (*M* = 4.22, *SD* = 0.40) all had significantly higher mean scores than democratic (*M* = 4.10, *SD* = 0.65) and feedback (*M* = 4.03, *SD* = 0.64) scores. While there is room for improvement in all scores, the respondents concurred that there is a shared leadership in the schools and an environment within the schools that addresses needs and supports the learning environment. The higher standard deviation for the two groups with lower scores may indicate that some participants may not be getting the same level of feedback from peers or leaders and/or may not feel that the democratic process for decision making includes them.

Searching for other supportive research relative to the study findings, I turned to the most recent School Quality Snapshot issued to schools by the NYC DOE (2015). The School Quality Snapshot measures six areas that the DOE believe are likely to improve student learning. They are rigorous instruction, collaborative teachers, supportive environment, effective school leadership, strong family ties, and trust. The two public charter schools who partnered in this study had good-to-excellent scores in all categories, as well as good-to excellent student achievement scores. Both schools had 90%+ scores on effective school leadership compared with 83% in the city, trust levels of 93% vs 90% in the city, and collaborative teacher results of 94% compared with 87% in the city indicating that the teachers work well with each other (NYC DOE, 2015).

The schools that participated in this study are relatively new, having opened in 2009 and 2010, but the results measured in Research Question 1 may be a leading indicator that PLCs take time to evolve a change in their school culture (Hord, 2008). Further, it may reinforce that success depends on a school's leaders to create structures

that build a collaborative culture (Fullan, 2014), and that collaboration results in a school

as a result of school culture (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). This finding relates directly to

the theoretical framework for this study which proposed that the social unit is defined as a

PLC (Merriam, 2002), which directly involves shared vision and reciprocal learning in a

community of practice (Hunt, 2009).

In the second research question, I examined the differences in any of the five major

dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and administrators. There was a significant

result for the MANOVA given the differences in scores for shares visions, addresses

needs, and provides feedback. The analysis conducted suggests that the null hypothesis be

rejected in favor of the alternative, which states that there is a statistical difference in at

least one of the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between teachers and

administrators.

The shares vision scores mean for administration/leadership were greater (M =

4.70, SD =0.47) than for teachers (M = 4.34, SD = 0.43). The addresses needs score

means were greater for administration/leadership (M = 4.51, SD = 0.32) than for teachers

(M = 4.33, SD = 0.47). The feedback scores were greater for the administration/leadership

(M = 4.36, SD = 0.636) than for the teachers (M = 3.91, SD = 0.60). The shares vision

score disparity may be an indication that there may be a difference perception in how

consensus is being reached on decision making, whether vision for improvement is

focused on student and teacher learning, or if improvements are addressing quality

learning experiences. The gap for addressed needs scores is not as wide but indicates a

difference in how teachers perceive their needs are being met to support collective

learning. This could be an indication that the environment may not be supporting their desire to discuss student-centered educational issues or act on what they have learned.

The feedback scores indicate an even wider gap between administrator and teacher means, indicating a possible inconsistency in the practice of shared information between leaders and teachers. Also significant is the standard deviation from mean scores for those in both roles indicating an even wider difference of perception for the two primary roles. Administrators/leaders may perceive that they are giving feedback to teachers, but there may not be adequate opportunity for teachers to visit and observe each other's teaching, or there is not significant interaction after observations. This is an opportunity for further exploration by the two schools that partnered in this study. The importance of understanding how teachers work together is referenced in many articles and studies (Avalos, 2011).

Include a topic sentence. Gregory (2010) focused on the importance of teacher learning and problem solving teams indicating that 60% of those surveyed noted improvement in their skills as a result of the collaborative teamwork. Additional reinforcement can be seen in one of the categories measured in the 2014-2015 School Quality Snapshot. The supportive environment category is where students, teachers, and parents are asked whether the school establishes a culture where students feel safe, are challenged to grow, and feel they have the support they need to meet high expectations. Both partnering schools had their lowest quality scores in this category where 81-82% responded positively to the question about being in a supportive environment, compared to 85% in the city (NYC DOE, 2015).

The supportive environment category is only one of the six categories in the New York City Framework for Great Schools where the partnering schools fall below the city and district averages. These quality review ratings might be used as supportive information as partnering schools look to address the gaps indicated in Research Question 2 of this study. The ongoing approach by the partnering school would be consistent with the theoretical framework of this study as it continues to gather information about perceptions across all or part of the five dimensions to test theories and measure attitudes about the school learning culture and performance (Creswell, 2013).

In the third research question, I examined any differences in the five major dimensions of the SPSaLC between participants who do or do not perceive themselves as part of a PLC. As this was the first time that a survey had been done at the partnering schools regarding PLCs, I asked this question to determine a baseline for the partnering schools and me to have regarding differences in perception scores based on whether study participants considered themselves to be members of a PLC. Two of the assumptions of the study were that the schools had not formally implemented a PLC and that the administrators participated to gain insight about the perceptions of their school community as a learning community. One of the significant findings of the study is that all participants in the study indicated that they were part of a PLC. As a result, there was no group variability to analyze for Question 3.

Implications for Social Change

This study will help the charter schools in the community see how they view themselves as a learning community and assist them in further determining whether their

practice as a learning community is impacting their student performance at the local level. I believe it will help other schools that might see that the practices of learning communities may be at the core of leading to promote social change.

There are three charter schools in the Staten Island school district. Each has its own mission, and all are focused on some area of significant social change. Two of the schools agreed to be partners, permitting me to recruit participants from their schools in this study. One is a Grade 6-12 school that opened 7 years ago and sits at the intersection of two great social movements, the growing movement to transform U.S. education and the movement to end discrimination against people with disabilities. They are providing a college preparatory education that equips and empowers students to go to college and succeed in life welcoming all students including those living with emotional challenges. This school amended their charter 2 years ago to hold a separate lottery for incoming students with special needs reserving 40% of seats for incoming sixth graders. They currently have 35% of their population as students with special needs. The school has a large minority population, with only 16% of the students being White. The other participating school has similar social justice needs with a focus on making a difference in the lives of middle school students who are English language learners. This school has a special needs population of 21% versus a citywide norm of approximately 15%. Given their mission, 54% of the student population is Hispanic and only 2% is White.

More than 75% of the students from both schools come from the most impoverished neighborhoods in the school district. Staten Island is the only Borough in the City of New York to have only one school district. The number of students in these

two schools who receive free or reduced priced lunch is between 75-85% of the school population, indicating that these children come from low-to-moderate income families. Promoting social change may have added significance in these schools given the cry for changes in the community stemming from a potential grand jury case related with the death of Eric Garner while resisting arrest by New York City police officers. Many of the families from the partnering schools live in the community or in neighborhoods that surround the community in which the Garner family lives.

There are many positives that exist within the categories measured, and they may provide even more opportunity to strengthen the collaborative capabilities that both schools have in place:

1. All participants identified themselves as members of a learning community.

2. The five categories of shared vision, democratic, addresses needs, feedback, and supports learning all had mean scores that were above 4 on the 5-point Likert scale indicating positive overall connection to the overall learning community concepts.

3. Although there were some significant differences in the administrator/leader and teacher scores in two categories, they were not so far apart as to question whether team members in different roles have a shared vision. Rather, there is an indication that there is more to be worked on to achieve continuous improvement as a learning community.

4.   These are relatively new schools with relatively young, new leaders and an environment where teacher, coteachers, and leaders are learning together as they build on their collaborative team efforts.

Learning and learning-centered leadership are core topics in educational literature and are part of the core problem addressed in this study. Senge (1990) observed that "organizations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organizational learning, but, without it no organizational learning occurs" (p. 139). Leadership models that focus on genuine learning are "individually and socially constructed by learners who are active observers of the world, and active questioners and active problem posers and solvers" (Gialamos et al., 2014).

Recommendations for Action

The analysis of Research Question 1 included one repeated measure ANOVA, which indicated significant differences between the scores for each of the five categories of learning community scores. Although mean scores were relatively high for all categories, the post-hoc pairwise comparisons suggested that the participants from both sites perceived that the shares values, addresses needs, and supports learning scores were significantly higher than the perception scores for democratic and feedback. I interpret that to mean that feedback/shared practice from either peers or leaders is not consistent and that the democratic process structure may not be working as effectively as designed or desired. My recommended actions are as follows:

1.   Present findings to leaders of both schools and discuss my interpretation of results and potential courses of action with them.

2.   I suggest that the leaders look at the data in conjunction with the School
        Quality Snapshot that they received from the NYC DOE for at least the
        past year.

3.   Both schools have development meetings such as summer planning
        sessions, midyear retreats, and ongoing teacher development meetings. I
        suggest that both schools consider presenting findings to all staff and
        soliciting their response to ideas for how to address issues for both
        democratic process and feedback at one of the retreats.

4.   Follow-up to the action items from those planning sessions might be
        ongoing discussion of actions at regularly scheduled team meetings and
        staff development meetings.

Regarding Research Question 2, the MANOVA indicated significant differences in perceptions of the learning community between administration/leadership and teachers. Specifically, I found that the school leaders viewed shares values, addresses needs, and feedback as better represented in the two schools than teachers did. My recommended actions would be similar to the actions recommended for Research Question 1. Given that there are three different groupings at issue here, I recommend that committees be set up to explore each of the three with leaders and teachers on the committees. Given that there may be overlap in some of the actions and potential outcomes, an initial task might be to decide whether the committee wants to pursue the three groups separately or tackle them together. That process may help to reinforce the importance of addressing some of the

democratic process and shared practice issues indicated in results of both research questions.

Regarding Research Question 3, I believe that it is important for the leaders to mention that all participants in the schools identified themselves as being part of a learning community. It would also be appropriate to indicate that the proposed analyses relative to primary roles in the school could not be conducted.

Recommendations for Further Study

I believe that the study accomplished the purpose intended, gaining insight into teacher and administrator perceptions about themselves, relative to the five dimensions of PLCs, as members of a learning community. Other than the recently developed School Quality Snapshot given by the New York City Department of Education, there is no indication that any other survey has ever been done in the partnering schools with a focus on PLCs and associated staff perceptions.

Given particular insights gained in this quantitative research study regarding democratic process and shared practice results, and, information gathered from the NYC DOE School Quality Snapshot, further research might be appropriate in the following areas:

1. Further quantitative research comparing the five dimensions of a PLC in schools with the Supportive Environment results in the School Quality Snapshot administered by the NYC DOE. A researcher may also deem it appropriate to explore comparative results of the dimensions of PLCs to all six categories measured in the School Quality Snapshot.

2.   As part of recommended actions, I suggested that both schools consider

presenting findings to all staff and soliciting their response to ideas for how

to address issues for both democratic process and shared practice

(feedback) at one of their retreats or professional development meetings. I

received comments from several prospective study participants at

recruitment meetings, as well as anonymous notes attached to completed

surveys, indicating that my presentation to them, and the focus of the study,

had inspired them to consider their own pursuit of doctoral studies.

Addressing the democratic process and shared practice issues, particularly

the significant perception differences between teachers and administrators

might be considered by a doctoral student as a project study involving one

or both of the partnering schools.

3.   Follow-up to the action items recommended to both schools might also

demonstrate a need for a longitudinal study measuring results at a future

point with potential mixed-method design given possibility of comparative

mean or standard deviation differences to the initial study.

Conclusion

My study reinforced that in addition to the data generated via participant survey,

there is other information available, including School Quality Snapshots, for all teachers

and leaders to further examine the relationship between their perceptions as a collaborative

learning community and their collective goals to positively impact student achievement.

As Bonnie Parks (2010) indicated, there may be some perception differences between

leaders and teachers, and, that has certainly proven true in this study. Critical to ongoing success is that the members of these learning communities continue to explore similarities and differences in democratic process, shared practice, and whatever other environmental indicators are appropriate to provide an educational environment which enhances student achievement. There is certainly a significant amount of information available for teachers and educational leaders to do this (Bell O'Leary, 2014). Interdependence of leaders and followers to learn and work together strengthens their interaction and builds an environment of shared leadership (Spillane, 2009).

Study results indicated that 100% of survey participants identify themselves as members of a PLC. Further, results measured in the 17 survey questions that form the five dimensions of PLCs in schools demonstrate strong perception scores, with mean scores for all being greater than 4 on the five-point Likert scale used to measure the dependent variable results.

The conclusion that I draw from this study is that via 100% identification as members of a PLC, the high participation level and strong mean perception scores there is an indication that the learning culture in the partnering schools is connected with providing a successful learning environment for students and educators. There is a clear indication that the partnering schools have strong perceptions about their organization having shared values and that the supportive learning environment addresses the needs of students and teachers.

The results of this study and recommended actions provide teachers and leaders with insights that will help to strengthen the learning community and build strong leaders

at all levels in the partnering schools. While there is always a possibility that school

leaders may perceive leadership differently than their teachers do, this study continues to

reinforce that a collaborative education culture and student achievement are highly

interconnected priorities. A collaborative effort by all in the community to continue to

learn together will provide increased focus on improving classroom effectiveness and

student performance.

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Appendix A: Principal Survey Request Letter

Sample of letter used after receiving IRB approval to begin collecting data.

August 19, 2015

Re: Walden University Doctoral Study, IRB approval # 08-17-15-0013014

Dear Mr.   :

As discussed previously, as part of the requirements for completion of my Doctoral studies at Walden University, I am doing research on how teachers and administrators in the three charter schools on Staten Island perceive themselves as members of a learning community.

The survey instrument that in the study is the *School Professional Staff as Learning Community* questionnaire that was developed by Shirley Hord and Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. It has been widely used since 1996 to address where the survey participant believes their school is in the development of five dimensional categories: shared power and decision making, shared vision, collective learning, peer review and supportive conditions. There is a demographic cover page and 17 questions in the survey which uses a 5 point Likert scale for data capture.

As the researcher, I would like to have the opportunity to speak to your teachers, staff and administrators at an upcoming meeting. I can distribute the survey at the end of the recruitment meeting, answer questions, and give participants directions on how to complete and return the survey to me. The survey is anonymous and will take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. Study participants will be provided with a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the completed anonymous survey directly to the researcher. A consent form will also be provided listing specifics of survey purpose, procedure, risks and benefits, rights, confidentiality, etc. I have attached a copy of the Walden University IRB approved consent form and a copy of the survey instrument.

When signed by you, this letter will serve as confirmation that you have agreed that will participate in the study. After I send your confirmation to Walden I will call to schedule a calendar date. I also look forward to sharing results with you post-study.
I hope all is well and look forward to catching-up with you. Feel free to call me to discuss.
Sincerely,

Donald G. Mulligan
Permission to participate in the *School Professional Staff as Learning Community* study:

_____ _____   ,
Principal   Date

Appendix B: SEDL Survey Consent Request

SEDL
ADVANCING RESEARCH
IMPROVING EDUCATION

SEDL License Agreement

To: Donald G. Mulligan (Licensee)
        Vice President for Advancement
        Lavelle Preparatory Charter School
        Corporate Commons One
        1 Teleport Drive
        Staten Island, NY 10311

From: Nancy Reynolds
        Information Associate
        SEDL
        Information Resource Center—Copyright Permissions
        4700 Mueller Blvd.
        Austin, TX 78723

Subject: License Agreement to reprint and distribute SEDL materials

Date: February 22, 2012; revised February 13, 2013 and April 11, 2014

Thank you for your interest in using SEDL's **School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire** (SPSLCQ) developed by Shirley Hord in 1996. This questionnaire will be referred to as the "work" in this License Agreement.

SEDL is pleased to grant permission for the Licensee's use of the work by administering it to teachers and administrators of a sample of public charter middle schools on Staten Island, NY, as the quantitative research component of his doctoral project at Walden University. The following are the terms, conditions, and limitations governing this limited permission to reproduce the work:

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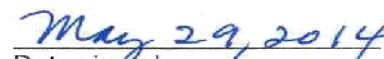
SEDL License Agreement, p.2

3. This permission is non-exclusive, non-transferable, and limited to the one-time use specified herein. This permission is granted solely for the period February 22, 2012 through December 31, 2015, inclusive. SEDL expressly reserves all rights in this material.

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6. This License Agreement to reproduce the work is limited to the terms hereof and is personal to the person and entity to whom it has been granted; and it may not be assigned, given, or transferred to any other person or entity.

7. SEDL is not charging the Licensee a copyright fee to use the work.

I'm e-mailing you a PDF of this License Agreement. Please print and sign one copy below, indicating that you understand and agree to comply with the above terms, conditions and limitations, and send the original back to me. If you wish to keep a copy with original signatures, please print a second copy, and also sign and return it to me and, after I receive and sign it, I'll return it with both of our signatures to you.

Thank you, again, for your interest in SEDL's *School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire*. If you have questions about SEDL's License Agreement, please contact me at 800-476-6861, ext. 6548 or 512-391-6548, or by e-mail at nancy.reynolds@sedl.org.
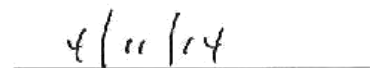
Sincerely,

Nancy Reynolds   May 29, 2014
Nancy Reynolds for SEDL   Date signed

Agreed and accepted:

Signature _____   4/11/14
                                                     Date signed

Printed Name   DONALD G. MULLIGAN

Appendix C: Participant Advice and Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a dissertation research study of teacher and administrator perceptions of themselves as a Professional Learning Community in public charter school.

You are being asked to participate in the study because you are a full-time teacher or member of the administration or staff of a school in the school district with focus on students in grades k-12.

Please read this form and ask any questions you have before agreeing to be part of the study.

This study is being conducted by researcher Donald G. Mulligan, a doctoral student at Walden University. Mr. Mulligan served as Vice President for Advancement, at the   Charter School from September 2010-August 2014 and is not currently employed at the school.

Background Information:
The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore teacher and administrator perceptions of themselves as a Professional Learning Community, and the impact of those perceptions on the school learning culture.

Procedures:
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete a "School Professional Staff as a Learning Community Questionnaire", developed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. You are being provided with a self-addressed stamped envelope to return the completed anonymous survey directly to the researcher.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
Your participation in this study is voluntary and anonymous. Your decision of whether or not you want to be in the study will be respected, and no one within your school will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you begin the survey, you may stop at any time. Since the survey is anonymous, completing and returning the survey will indicate consent. You may keep this consent form.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Risks: There is a possibility that you may perceive coercion to participate because the researcher is a former staff member at one of the participating schools and is a member of the education community on Staten Island. All data collected will be anonymous and produce no known risk.

Benefits: You may benefit by seeing how faculty at your school compare to what researchers determine about Professional Learning Communities on Staten Island and impact on the learning culture.

Compensation:
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Confidentiality:
Any information you provide will be anonymous. The researcher will not use your information for any purposes outside of this research project.

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions regarding this study you can contact the researcher Donald Mulligan, The Researchers faculty advisor Dr. Mary Ann Wangemann, or the Walden University Research Participant advocate.

Contact information for each is as follows:
Donald Mulligan via email at donald.mulligan@waldenu.edu

Dr. Mary Ann Wangemann at maryann.wangemann@waldenu.edu

The **Walden University Research Participant Advocate** can be can be contacted by you if you have any questions about your rights as a survey participant. The advocate can be reached at 612-312-1210 or via email at IRB@waldenu.edu. Walden University's approval number for this study is 08-17-15-0013014 and it expires August 16, 2016.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation.

Donald G. Mulligan

Appendix D: Survey Instrument

School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire

Date: _____

Name: _____

School: _____

Directions: This questionnaire concerns your perceptions about your school staff as a learning organization. There are no right or wrong responses. Please consider where you believe your school is in its development of each of the five numbered descriptors shown in bold-faced type on the left. Each sub-item has a five-point scale. On each scale, circle the number that best represents the degree to which you feel your school has developed.

1. School administrators participate democratically, with teachers sharing power, authority, and decision making.

1a.

5	4	3	2	1
Although there are some legal and fiscal decisions required of the principal, school administrators consistently involve the staff in discussing and making decisions about school issues.		Administrators invite advice and counsel from staff and then make decisions themselves.		Administrators never share information with the staff nor provide opportunities to be involved in decision making.

1b.

5	4	3	2	1
Administrators involve the entire staff.		Administrators involve a small committee, council, or team of staff.		Administrators do not involve any staff.

2. The staff shares visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning, and these visions are consistently referenced in the staff's work.

2a.

5	4	3	2	1
Visions for improvement are discussed by the entire staff such that consensus and a shared vision result.		Visions for improvement are not thoroughly explored; some staff members agree and others do not.		Visions for improvement held by the staff members are widely divergent.

2b.

5	4	3	2	1
Visions for improvement are always focused on students, teaching, and learning.		Visions for improvement are sometimes focused on students, teaching, and learning.		Visions for improvement do not target students, teaching, and learning.

2c.

5	4	3	2	1
Visions for improvement target high-quality learning experiences for all students.		Visions for improvement address quality learning experiences in terms of students' abilities.		Visions for improvement do not include concerns about the quality of learning experiences.

3. The staff's collective learning and application of the learnings (taking action) create high intellectual learning tasks and solutions to address student needs.

	5	4	3	2	1
3a.	The entire staff meet to discuss issues, share information, and learn with and from one another.		Subgroups of the staff meet to discuss issues, share information, and learn with and from one another.		Individuals randomly discuss issues, share information, and learn with and from one another.
3b.	The staff meet regularly and frequently on substantive student-centered educational issues.		The staff meet occasionally on substantive student-centered educational issues.		The staff never meet to consider substantive educational issues.
3c.	The staff discuss the quality of their teaching and students' learning.		The staff does not often discuss their instructional practices nor its influence on student learning.		The staff basically discuss non-teaching and non-learning issues.
3d.	The staff, based on their learnings, make and implement plans that address students' needs, more effective teaching, and more successful student learning.		The staff occasionally act on their learnings and make and implement plans to improve teaching and learning.		The staff do not act on their learnings.
3e.	The staff debrief and assess the impact of their actions and make revisions.		The staff infrequently assess their actions and seldom make revisions based on the results.		The staff do not assess their work.

4. Peers review and give feedback based on observing one another's classroom behaviors in order to increase individual and organizational capacity.

	5	4	3	2	1
4a.	Staff members regularly and frequently visit and observe one another's classroom teaching.		Staff members occasionally visit and observe one another's teaching.		Staff members never visit their peers' classrooms.
4b.	Staff members provide feedback to one another about teaching and learning based on their classroom observations.		Staff members discuss non-teaching issues after classroom observations.		Staff members do not interact after classroom observations.

5. School conditions and capacities support the staff's arrangement as a professional learning organization.

	5	4	3	2	1
5a.	Time is arranged and committed for whole staff interactions.		Time is arranged but frequently the staff fail to meet.		Staff cannot arrange time for interacting.
5b.	The size, structure, and arrangements of the school facilitate staff proximity and interaction.		Considering the size, structure, and arrangements of the school, the staff are working to maximize interaction.		The staff take no action to manage the facility and personnel for interaction.
5c.	A variety of processes and procedures are used to encourage staff communication.		A single communication method exists and is sometimes used to share information.		Communication devices are not given attention.
5d.	Trust and openness characterize all of the staff members.		Some of the staff members are trusting and open.		Trust and openness among the staff members.
5e.	Caring, collaborative, and productive relationships exist among all staff members.		Caring and collaboration are inconsistently demonstrated among the staff members.		Staff members are isolated and work alone at their task.

Hord, S. M. (1996). *School professional staff as learning community questionnaire.* Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire
Demographic Information

For Researcher use only: School Code: _____
Participant Code: _____

Date: _____

Primary Responsibility at School:

____ Teaching

____ Administrative

____ Other Support Staff

Do you consider yourself to be part of a Professional Learning Community:

____ YES

____ NO