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Teacher and Administrator Responses to Bullying Within a Professional Learning Community

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Tracey Gomez

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Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2003

BA, California State University, Stanislaus, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

In a local suburban K–8 school in California, administrators and teachers were concerned when more than half of the fifth- and seventh-grade students indicated on the California Healthy Kids Survey that they do not feel safe at school. Researchers have noted that using a professional learning community (PLC) model in schools may assist with addressing bullying. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' and administrators' responses to incidences of bullying and the PLC processes used to address such incidents in their school. The conceptual framework for this study was Hord's dimensions of the PLC. Data were collected through individual interviews with 8 fifth- through eighth-grade teachers and 2 administrators. The collected data were open coded and analyzed to reveal themes that addressed the research questions. The findings indicated that teachers and administrators expressed a need for more opportunities for collaboration, required additional professional development to address bullying, and had varying views on strategies to address bullying situations. Recommendations include providing more collaboration time and additional training for teachers and administrators on responses to bullying within a PLC. This study may affect positive social change by providing research findings supporting the preparation of teachers and administrators at the study site to address bullying situations by following more closely the processes of a PLC. This information might positively affect school climate and students' feelings of safety at the school.

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Dedication

This Doctoral Study is dedicated to my dad, Lou George, who always taught me to work hard to achieve your dreams and live your life to the fullest, and to my brother-in-law, Jimboree Martin – YOLO!

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I would like to thank my husband, Darren, for his support throughout my many years of schooling, and his ability to make me laugh every day. I would also like to thank my daughters, Gabrielle and Lexie, for dealing with a stressed mom during this process, and for being a constant reminder of my biggest accomplishment – raising self-sufficient, independent young women with incredible motivation and perseverance. Special thanks to my sister, Sandy, for always keeping me motivated, and helping me to see the bright side of everything, and my mom and the rest of my family and friends for their encouragement and listening ears.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The National Center for Education Statistics reported in the 2010–2011 school year that 28% of students ages 12 through 18 years indicated that they had been bullied at school (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The effect of bullying on school climate is gaining attention in many countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, Canada, Norway, and Japan, whose societies and governments acknowledged bullying as a serious social phenomenon (Huang, Hong, & Espelage, 2013). The results of the study indicated that almost 50% of students were targets of indirect bullying behavior. According to Bibou-Nakou, Tsiantis, Assimopoulous, Chatzilambou, and Giannakopoulou (2012), bullying is an international issue that affects students' feeling of safety at school. Poteat, Mereish, DiGiovanni, and Koenig (2011) found that bullying also appears to be a near-universal issue found across all ethnic groups, and Tippett and Wolke (2014) added a socioeconomic connection as well. Although there may be differences in the amount and type of bullying throughout countries and cultures, there seems to be a consensus regarding the definition. Olweus (1993), known as the pioneer on bullying research, said, "A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (p. 9).

Because bullying often occurs at school, teachers may be able to make a difference in student feelings of safety by reducing bullying incidents that affect the climate within a school community. Roland, Bru, Midthassel, and Vaaland (2010)

reported that it is necessary to incorporate interventions that target the prevention of and procedures for handling bullying issues among all parties, including offenders, victims, and bystanders, when the action occurs. Schools across the country could benefit by having additional information to foster students' feeling of safety within the school learning community. Federal and state laws, such as the School Safety and Violence Prevention Act and Title IV Safe and Drug-Free Schools, provide schools with funding to purchase curricular programs and materials to specifically promote a safe atmosphere.

Problem Statement

In a local K–8 grade school, 55% of seventh-grade students who completed the California Healthy Kids Survey (CHKS) expressed that they were harassed or afraid of being beaten up at some time during the school year. In fifth grade, 52% of students specified that they had been bullied during the year. In 2011, when only seventh-grade students were surveyed, 58% reported they were verbally harassed; 40% were shoved, pushed, or hit; and 24% indicated that they had been cyber bullied, demonstrating a 3% increase in the amount of bullying during this 2-year period.

This study focused on bullying and its effect on the school community and student feelings of safety in a K–8 grade school of approximately 820 students. The fifth- and seventh-grade students in a suburban town in California specified that bullying is prevalent at school, which may make them feel the school climate is unsafe. The CHKS is administered every 2 years to fifth- and seventh-grade students; however, recently the funding changed and it is now presented to seventh-grade students only. The survey questions addressed student feelings and experiences with bullying and harassment,

weapons and gangs, drugs and alcohol, sexual behavior, and other health related issues. In this study, the focus was on bullying and harassment. Although the percentages in the other areas registered at less than 15%, more than 50% of the students had been bullied or harassed, which stands out as a focus area for administrators and teachers.

To address the problem of school safety, school administrators implemented a character education program with strategies for positive discipline. After a brief introductory training, the teachers, administrators, and other school staff members worked diligently to create a safe community environment by providing campus aides in the cafeteria, play yard, middle school common areas, and restroom areas, to decrease bullying incidents. The administrators also amended the collaborative processes of a professional learning community (PLC) within the school by focusing on enhancing a school climate that promotes a culture of trust. When DuFour (2007) referred to the processes of a PLC, he emphasized the importance of having administrators and teachers focus collaboratively on critical issues within the school setting to promote an atmosphere for learning.

In the local setting, at least three populations can be affected by bullying: (a) students who may be worried about bullying, (b) teachers who are dealing with bullying situations, and (c) administrators who are implementing a disciplined process to deal with bullying incidents.

In the community school for this study, most students live within walking distance, making students who walk or ride a bike vulnerable to bullying incidents before and after school. In this study, I focused on bullying incidents during school because

those that occur outside of school may not be reported; however, I acknowledge that bullying incidents may begin outside of school before coming into the school and classroom setting. Although the CHKS report was limited to statistical information for fifth- and seventh-grade students, members of the school population, including other students, teachers, and administrators, are affected by bullying. Within the school setting, where many students indicated incidences of bullying and harassment on the CHKS, teachers may need to take time away from instruction in the classroom to handle bullying incidents, which could negatively affect the well-being of students.

Despite efforts to address the issue of bullying for students in the school, administrators have not planned ongoing professional development within the PLC processes. The findings from this study were derived from exploring the problem of bullying, school safety, and the effect on school climate within a learning community. The study results may inform the planning of future professional development focused on bullying and may improve the PLC processes within the school.

Because the CHKS survey contains several questions about bullying, school safety, and school climate, it could indicate that the problem may be present in other California schools as well. In further support, the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice Indicators of School Crime and Safety Report (2013) documented sixth and seventh grades as the highest risk period for peer victimization to occur (Varjas, Henrich, & Meyers, 2009).

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative case study, I interviewed teachers and administrators from a

suburban school in California to understand how they respond to bullying incidents and how they use the processes of a PLC to address bullying occurrences. Stake (1995) defined *case study* as "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). In this study, I focused on elementary teacher and administrator descriptions of bullying in Grades 5 through 8, which represents the commonplace situation in middle schools. Creswell (2007) suggested that a case study should be based on a case that shows a variety of perspectives on the problem, so I asked eight of the 12 teachers in Grades 5 through 8, along with the principal and vice principal, to participate in an interview to describe their varied perceptions and experiences with their response to bullying and how they use the processes of a PLC to address student safety issues and school climate.

Creswell (2007) explained that case study is a qualitative research design, or an area of study, as well as an inquiry that allows researchers to gain a better understanding of a topic of interest. I gained this understanding by seeking the answers to the research questions through data collection involving a variety of sources of information, including interviews and school documents, such as schedules and public bullying reports. Because more than half of the fifth- and seventh-grade students expressed in the CHKS that they were harassed or afraid at school, a general understanding is needed regarding bullying in Grades 5 through 8 at the research site. The implications from this research study may be to learn more about how teachers and administrators respond to bullying incidents in the classroom and how using the processes of a PLC can have a positive effect on the atmosphere of the school.

Research Questions

This study may help educators gain a better understanding of teachers' and administrators' perceptions of bullying and student safety in a K–8 school. I focused on two central questions, derived from the problem statement and further explained in the purpose of the study, to guide this inquiry:

1. How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators describe their response to bullying incidents?
2. How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators describe the PLC processes they use to address the critical issue of bullying?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore teacher and administrator descriptions and experiences in responding to bullying incidences in fifth- through eighth-grade at a local K–8 school. This qualitative case study searched for understanding, a description of things happening more or less without expectation of causal explanation (Stake, 1995) to gain insight on bullying and student feelings of safety at this school. Having a greater understanding of how teachers and administrators describe and handle bullying situations in the classroom and in the school can facilitate further professional development and positively affect the amount of bullying and the culture at this school.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is based on the collaborative processes of the PLC, which is designed to establish a culture of trust and change that positively

affects the school climate. Hord (1997), a leading researcher in this area, conducted an extensive review of literature involving PLCs and as a result, defined it as professionals dedicated to learning together and working toward the advancement of student learning (Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Olivier, 2008). Hord (2009) further defined PLCs by using the definitions of each individual word in its name. *Professionals* are the individuals responsible for providing effective instruction, *learning* is the endeavor in which professionals participate to enrich their knowledge or skills, and *community* refers to the persons coming together to identify topics, purpose, and meaning. Hipp et al. outlined the dimensions of a PLC including "shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, supportive conditions, and external factors" (p. 175). Additional information on each dimension will be explained in Section 2.

Teachers involved in a PLC work together to foster a safe and effective school atmosphere by focusing on current issues, participating in the processes of a PLC, establishing goals, sharing experiences, and devising effective methods and assessment to help students feel safe and learn (Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2010). DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) said PLCs are a community effort designed to increase teacher collaboration in an ongoing practice of collective inquiry and research to achieve successful student results. The process of a PLC allows for teachers to collaborate on fundamental issues, such as bullying and school safety.

DuFour et al. (2008) contended one of the primary characteristics of a PLC, collaboration, is an orderly procedure in which teachers are working together to examine

and change professional practice in an effort to improve positive outcomes for their students and school. Hipp et al. (2008) recorded this dimension as a collective learning and application for teachers to collaboratively work on planning, solve problems, and improve opportunities for learning. Although PLCs assist teachers in building and maintaining a positive atmosphere with a culture of trust that promotes student feelings of safety, bullying can disrupt student learning in an environment in which students do not feel safe. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010) maintained that the commitment to continuous improvement for every student and adult learner defined by a PLC establishes the goal for educators to strive for a culture of trust and change that fosters perpetual learning.

Although the administrators do not call the processes used in the school a PLC, the teachers at the research site are currently involved in collective learning, application through collaborative meetings, and maintaining a shared vision. For example, teachers and administrators collaborate weekly to discuss student progress and instructional strategies. Educators in the school participate in reflective dialogue to create an atmosphere where students feel safe. Because victimization is related to students' perceptions of school safety and those who report being bullied feel less safe in school, Varjas et al. (2009) reported that one of the goals is to create a culture of trust and a culture of change in which students feel safe and comfortable.

Creating the culture of trust and change involves all members of the school. Hipp et al. (2008) agreed that school culture is composed of interactions between teachers, students, administrators, parents, and others, and it exemplifies the shared expectations,

values, beliefs, and habits that establish the standards for the school that form how professionals think, feel, and act. An open flow of communication, along with a method for solving problems through the PLC framework, can create a structure for continuous improvement. In this particular case study, the students expressed their feelings about school safety and bullying in a state survey, giving the teachers an area to focus their PLC efforts toward establishing a positive school culture. Hipp et al. also reported that the PLC could help raise the interest in improving the quality of learning and life among all members of the community by promoting the value of individual and collective learning.

Based on prior experience at the school site, the PLC conceptual framework will provide a basis of knowledge for research regarding the possibility that teachers and administrators may not be as knowledgeable about handling bullying situations as they wished. They may not fully understand the act of bullying or see the importance of their reaction when students present them with a situation. A PLC can provide teachers and administrators with the opportunity to identify needs, expand knowledge, and establish and maintain a shared purpose and vision for student safety and learning. Participants' perspectives regarding bullying, school safety, and PLCs will be shared through open ended interviews that will provide the data from which the researcher will generate meaning (Creswell, 2003) and then put into narrative form.

Definition of Terms

The research study includes terms associated with bullying. The following terms are derived from the literature and defined based on the context of the study.

Bullying refers to a student "being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students" (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). According to Garrett (2003), an additional definition of bullying includes, "unwanted words or physical actions that can make a person feel bad" (Garrett, 2003, p. 5).

Negative actions occur when "someone intentionally inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another" (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). Negative actions can include verbal responses such as "teasing, taunting, threatening, and calling names" and physical responses such as "hitting, pushing, kicking, and pinching. Other negative actions can include making faces or dirty gestures, and excluding someone from a group" (Olweus, 1993, p. 9).

Assumptions

The assumptions of this study include that all participants have followed school and district procedures to respond to bullying incidents in the school. Another assumption is that the teachers and administrators use PLC processes to address critical issues, such as bullying, at the school.

Limitations

This case study interviewed eight of the 12 fifth- through eighth-grade teachers, the principal, and the vice-principal at a suburban K–8 school of approximately 820 students. The study was limited by teacher and administrator descriptions of their experiences when responding to bullying in individual classrooms at the school site. Each individual may have a different level of understanding of what constitutes bullying, in

addition to a varied tolerance level of actions in the classroom. Also, teachers and administrators are self-reporting, which can be problematic in that experiences may not be communicated to me exactly as they happened. The teacher and administrator experiences may not represent the overall population of the school and may affect the generalizability of the findings.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this research study was limited to one suburban K–8 school in California. The area of interest included fifth- through eighth-grade teachers interested in being a part of a study regarding bullying, as well as the principal and vice principal.

Creswell (2003) stated that delimitations are used to narrow the scope of the study. Because case studies typically concentrate on a small number of participants, the study included eight of the 12 teachers and two administrators at this suburban school site. Teachers at other grade levels at the research site were not included, and the study was not conducted in more than one school; therefore, varying viewpoints remained outside the scope of this particular study.

The Significance of the Study

Investigating how teachers and administrators respond to bullying incidents and use collaborative processes of a PLC to handle bullying situations to improve the climate of the school is significant for several reasons. First, the results of the study can affect the local setting by adding to the teacher and administrator educational knowledge of the most effective ways to handle bullying incidents. Second, introducing new strategies through the process of a PLC can assist teachers and administrators in effectively

handling bullying situations to improve school climate. Finally, a catalyst for social change can be initiated by using collaborative processes to improve school climate and student feelings of safety at school. The following sections describe the significance of the study.

Professional Application

This research study on bullying, and how it is addressed in a middle school environment is significant to the professional development of educators for a few reasons. Teacher training to handle bullying situations may be an important component to increasing student feelings of safety at school. Sahin (2010) emphasized that it is impossible to consider bullying as an issue that is independent from teachers. He wrote that it is crucial to provide peer bullying training to teachers. Without training to effectively handle bullying, teachers may not feel confident in their ability to foster student safety when the situations arise in the classroom. As a result, students are often referred to the administrators and miss instructional time.

In addition, some teachers at the research site mentioned they do not have the time during class or the training necessary to properly manage the situations that arise, and they find it more effective and less time consuming to send the students to the office. If teachers gain knowledge on bullying, they can become more aware of how to instruct their students, including the bullies, victims, and bystanders, on what to do when they are in a bullying situation. Victims of bullying can be given the tools necessary to build self-confidence and handle situations in a proper manner. Students who participate in bullying behavior can be taught how to change their own behaviors, therefore positively affecting

their future and that of others. Teachers can affect many students in the course of their careers. If they are instructing students on bullying every year they teach, they can affect the amount of bullying taking place and help to prevent the negative effects that may be a result of this behavior.

Although there are many studies in the area of bullying, there is little research on the effects of the PLC processes to handle bullying incidents. Many schools in a variety of countries have studied bullying, indicating there is a tremendous concern for all aspects of bullying. The data from this study can show the importance of providing training so that qualified people can effectively handle bullying situations. The study results may also help school leaders create initiatives to increase student feelings of safety.

Positive Social Change

The positive social change implications include data and knowledge useful for educators, parents, students, administrators, professional developers, policy makers, and other researchers who need direction in collaborative processes for addressing bullying incidents to promote a positive school climate. Long-term results would include more information on handling bullying issues, effectively identifying a bullying concern, and forming a PLC to address the social needs of the school and students. The implications will follow the premise of a case study in that what we learn in a particular instance can be transferred to similar cases and it will be up to the reader to determine what can apply to his or her context (Merriam & Associates, 2002). There have been numerous studies regarding bullying, and data found from the current study will hopefully connect and

relate to a much larger issue that has been shown around the world.

Summary

This qualitative case study proposal is organized into three sections and explored the issue of bullying with school administrators and regular education classroom teachers. The first section included an introduction to the study, problem statement, an overview of data collection and analysis, research questions, purpose of the study, conceptual framework, definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations, and the conceptual framework. In Section 2, I present literature on bullying that guided the study. In Section 3, I present the research design and methodology of this qualitative case study. In Section 4, I discuss the findings of the study and how they relate to the literature and the conceptual framework.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Section 2 contains a detailed examination of the professional literature, problem, and conceptual framework as it relates to the problem of bullying. Teacher and student perceptions of school bullying, as well as professional development related to teacher preparation in this area, will be addressed in this section. The literature review is based on the premise that the collaborative processes of a PLC provide a culture of trust and change within a school, positively affecting critical issues such as bullying, student safety, and school climate.

To examine all of the pertinent areas related to the research questions, I explored resources pertaining to the topic of bullying, professional learning communities, academic performance, school climate, and school safety, as well as surrounding materials in Walden University databases such as ERIC, Education: A Sage full-text collection, Education Research Complete, Thoreau, and government data websites.

This literature review focuses on a PLC as the conceptual framework, bullying in the educational setting, perceptions of bullying and school safety, professional development within a PLC, and strategies for bullying prevention and intervention. I also describe bullying in the school setting, teacher training on bullying, and an analysis of current research on other areas directly affecting the topic of bullying. In addition, the literature review reveals limitations in the research, and I identify areas for further study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the PLC as a culture of trust and a

culture of change, where students look to schools as a safe place where they can be free to participate in academic opportunities and social endeavors. Building a culture of trust that supports students can be a challenging task for administrators and teachers. According to DuFour and Marzano (2011), PLCs function by assuming that the key to improved student learning is ongoing, collaborative learning by educators within the school system. The act of collaboration, or working together, is an important component to building a culture of trust. Adult relationships that can support one another, foster trust, and allow for changes to take place can assist with school improvement. It is within a PLC that this culture of trust is explained and defined.

To describe the basis of a PLC and a culture of trust more completely, certain practitioners have given a more in-depth explanation of the concept. Hord's (1997) original research established five dimensions of a PLC: "(a) Shared and supportive leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions" (p. 15). Hord defined a PLC as a group of professionals working and learning together to improve student learning and set the framework for future studies on PLCs. Hipp et al. (2008, p. 175) adapted Hord's research to the framework listed in Table 1.

Shared and Supportive Leadership

Hord (2007) illustrated that shared and supportive leadership exists when the administrators of the school are learners, and view themselves on the same level as the teachers.

Table 1

Hipp's Framework Based on Hord's Research on PLCs

Dimensions	Description
Shared and supportive leadership	Administrators share power, authority, and decision-making, while promoting and nurturing leadership.
Shared values and vision	The staff share visions that have an undeviating focus on student learning, and support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.
Collective learning and application	The staff share information and work collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning opportunities.
Shared personal practice	Peers meet and observe one another to provide feedback on instructional practices, to assist in student learning and to increase human capacity.
Supportive conditions – relationships	Peers meet and observe one another to provide feedback on instructional practices, to assist in student learning and to increase human capacity.
Supportive conditions – structures	…include respect, trust, norms of critical inquiry and improvement, and positive, caring relationships among the entire school community.
External factors	…include parents, community, and central office

Note. From Sustaining professional learning communities: Case studies by Hipp, K., Huffman, J., Pankake, A. and Olivier, D., 2008.

The principals treat the teachers as colleagues and peers, rather than in a hierarchy. Northouse (2010) said administrators should share the authority, facilitate work to be implemented by the staff, and participate in the learning and decision making without

domination.

DuFour et al. (2008) examined the principles of shared leadership and argued that the expertise should be widely distributed throughout the school, with principals working together with the teachers to examine critical issues. Teachers assume leadership roles and work collaboratively to examine the school practices on critical issues and improve the school climate. DuFour et al. further stated that the concept of a PLC should provide the means for a new school culture, which needs the principal, as well as teacher leaders, to lead the discussion about critical issues. According to Crowther (2009), student improvement is possible through shared leadership of teachers and administrators within the processes of a PLC.

Shared Values and Vision

Part of a school's culture begins with a statement that is created by the partners in the school community to show where the district envisions the school for the future. Hord (2004) asserted that a shared vision for a school that encompasses and fosters a positive learning environment for all students is at the heart of a PLC. DuFour et al. (2008) said that teachers and administrators form this foundation by creating a vision that supports student learning, establishes goals and values on how to make progress, and answers the question regarding what one must become to fulfill this vision. When a group collectively works to create a vision, there is a sense of ownership and commitment toward meeting the goals of the school.

A shared vision also allows the staff the opportunity to build consensus regarding common goals, aspirations, and direction. Hord (1997, 2004) indicated a core

characteristic of a PLC is that the staff envisions students as academically capable in an environment that will allow for them to achieve their potential. A safe school atmosphere can contribute to a culture of trust and help provide students with an environment conducive to learning.

Collective Learning and Application

When teachers are involved in a collaborative process, such as a PLC, they can discuss and implement effective strategies to handle bullying situations to foster school safety and learning. DuFour et al. (2008) found that collective learning and application is crucial to the success of any school. In addition, researchers such as Schlechty (2005) and Fullan (2007) found that it is not possible to create a culture of change without the collaborative efforts of the teachers.

Collaboration, as defined by Kimmel (2012), is a cooperative process that allows people with a variety of areas of expertise to plan, implement, and evaluate mutually defined issues. In the case of education, teachers work together to develop strong learning communities that will allow them to share their knowledge, discuss best practices, and observe the success of one another. DuFour et al. (2008) stated collaborative groups implement curriculum, foster instruction, and create a meaningful assessment that assumes a collective responsibility of students to achieve a higher level of learning. Musanti and Pence (2010) maintained that collaborative practices are a central component of professional development because teachers can establish relationships in which they can reflect, share, discuss beliefs on teaching and learning, and build knowledge together.

Building on existing knowledge includes a reflective effort on the part of the members of the PLC to establish goals for the school and student learning. DuFour et al. (2008) contended that collaborative teams are a key component to PLCs and are formed to work interdependently to achieve the goals set forth in the vision for the school. DuFour further stated that because the vision of many schools includes a safe learning environment, it is necessary for teachers to collaborate and identify the barriers to student learning, which may include bullying.

Although bullying can be the antithesis of a safe learning environment, teacher collaboration can work to create a culture of trust to promote academic performance. Collaborative teams include collective inquiry, which DuFour et al. (2008) defined as the process of building knowledge by refining questions for the group to examine together. This type of inquiry explored current and best practices for teaching and learning, as well as ongoing assessment of curriculum, programs, and student levels in relation to bullying and academic performance.

Ongoing evaluation of school programs and teaching practices allows administrators and teachers to reflect on current methods to test for effectiveness in student learning. In a mixed-method case study, Graham (2007) examined the relationship between PLCs and teacher improvement at the middle school level. The study used teacher interviews, a survey regarding professional development, and a review of school documents from a school with a predominantly White, middle class population in the southeast with 662 sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade students and 24 core academic teachers. The teachers were organized into PLC teams, which met regularly.

Data collection included a professional development survey, completed by 15 of the teachers, to address teacher experiences and behavior regarding PLC activities in which they participated. The survey was based on Garet et al.'s (1999) study on professional development, in which the authors identified "six features of professional development: (a) activity type, (b) activity duration, (c) collective participation, (d) focus on content, (e) promoting active learning, and (f) fostering coherence" (Graham, 2007, p. 4).

The results of the survey were used to identify characteristics of PLC activities that exhibited changes in content, knowledge, and skills in instructional practices, as well as variations regarding experience, grade level, and subjects taught. Emphasis on content, active learning, and consistency showed positive changes in knowledge, skills, practice and overall, the teachers reported moderate levels of adjustment in their teaching practices as a result of participating in a PLC.

In addition, in the Graham (2007) study, 10 teachers participated in interviews concentrating on the relationship component of PLC activities, teacher and school characteristics, as well as positive gains in knowledge, skills, and instructional behavior. The researcher analyzed documents at the school, including meeting minutes, the school website, the School Improvement Plan, and internal surveys, to support the information from the interviews. The information from this analysis was presented in three categories: "(a) nature of PLC activities, (b) the relationship between PLC activities and teacher improvement, and (c) PLC activities in the context of the organization" (Graham, 2007, p. 8). The teachers met regularly in same-grade, same-subject level groups to examine a variety of issues. Most of the sixth- and seventh-grade teachers reported that PLCs

affected their professional growth, and indicated it was often a result of the opportunity to collaborate with other educators. One of the strongest themes to materialize from the interviews was the notion of professional collaboration and support from the leader of the school and other teachers. Graham stated that in turn, this professional development growth with teachers and administrators can positively affect academic performance and its possible relationship to bullying.

In addition to collaboration, the administrators within a school are an important component of professional development and PLCs. In Cranston's (2011) study of 12 elementary and secondary school principals, from a variety of school sizes in urban, suburban, and rural communities in Manitoba, a naturalistic inquiry approach was used to survey perceptions of PLCs. This method studied naturally occurring activities by conducting two focus groups and individual principal interviews over a 6-month period to examine the characteristics identified by school principals in their formations of PLCs at their school site.

There were five key themes that emerged from the Cranston (2011) study: (a) trust is cultivated when teachers are working with others; (b) to nurture relational trust, group norms regarding risk-taking and change are necessary to foster a safe, comfortable culture for professional development; (c) relational trust supports effective collaboration; (d) the principal plays a crucial role in establishing a climate of trust, and (e) trust of the principal on the part of the teachers is vital. Principals in the study indicated that not only does trust allow teachers to feel more comfortable at work and learn more efficiently, but it also encourages a security level that allows them to begin the process of questioning

their work more effectively. In turn, questioning one's work can allow more opportunity for reflection and openness to new teaching practices in relation to handling bullying issues in the classroom.

Shared Personal Practice

Shared personal practice in the PLC focuses on a part of a collaboration that encourages teacher observation and feedback that enhances student learning. Cranston (2011) stated that in order for shared personal practice to occur within collaborative teams, there must be a level of trust among the teachers and the leadership involved in the collaborative processes of a PLC. The acceptance of critical review promotes openness to changing methods of teachers, and can ultimately improve school climate. This level of relational trust can further provide the opportunity for conversations at a deeper emotional level about bullying and school climate to further support student learning. Cranston's (2011) research further strengthened the framework of Hipp et al. (2008) and the tenets of supportive conditions.

Supportive Conditions

Supportive conditions include an environment that encourages educators to collaborate through observation and feedback to address school issues, such as bullying and student safety. Teachers showcase intervention strategies to their colleagues and receive feedback that can assist future interaction in similar situations. Hipp et al. (2008) asserted the type of conversation that occurs as a result of collegial observations and evaluations requires the teachers and administrators participating in the processes of a PLC to have relational trust when discussing critical issues like bullying. Creating a

school climate that encourages teachers to express their viewpoints, share experiences, and effectively address critical issues like bullying, when in collaboration with administrators, is indicative of supportive conditions within a school community.

Supportive conditions within a school may help teachers feel a sense of security that can lead them into questioning and critiquing their intervention practices to create a culture of change at the school. Hord (1997) found that this part of the PLC process is not an evaluation of colleagues, but a review to discuss observations based on the desire for individual and school improvement. The culture of change among the teachers can support a positive environment in the school and progress to the students. Because bullying is the antithesis of a safe environment, a positive culture can help to provide students with a supportive place to learn.

School climate can also play a role in the amount of collaboration and the level of school support. In a mixed-method study conducted in Iceland by Sigurdardottir (2010), the relationship between school effectiveness and the PLC was examined. The intervention included the administrators joining a study group on the PLC, the staff working together to focus on student learning, establishing a clear vision, and in-service training on differentiated learning. Sigurdardottir (2010) used observations, questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis in the data collection process. The findings showed a substantial relationship between the level of school effectiveness and a school climate that supports collaboration.

The type of instruction that supports collaboration may also help to promote civility among students. The school climate established by this level of trust among

colleagues may assist teachers and administrators with building a culture of trust and culture of change for their students to positively affect critical issues like bullying. In turn, Bower and Powers (2009) asserted that school climate has a direct effect on student learning.

An additional component of Hord's (2007) supportive conditions in a PLC is to assist in student learning. Because critical issues like bullying may have an effect on academic performance, administrators and teachers may need to consider this possibility. A meta-analytic review of 33 studies and 29,552 participants completed by Nakamoto and Schwartz (2009) examined the connection between peer victimization and academic achievement. Due to the limited amount of longitudinal studies in this particular area, the meta-analysis focused on the concurrent association between the two variables during the timeframe between 1978, when Olweus (1993), often considered the founding father of bullying research, published his first book on bullying, and 2007. The analysis used self-reported data, along with peer, teacher, and parent report measures to assess various forms of peer victimization. Indicators of academic achievement included grades, standardized test scores, and teacher assessment of academic achievement. The effect size and sample size were coded for all of the studies that fit the above criteria, along with characteristics regarding the peer victimization measure, the academic achievement indicator, shared method variance, and the setting of the study. The result of this meta-analysis showed a negative association between peer victimization and concurrent academic functioning, implicating that peer victimization is connected to concurrent difficulties in academics.

Kessel, Schneider, O'Donnell, Stueve and Coulter (2012) also found a link between school performance and victimization in a study on bullying and high school students. Students self-reported a lower level of attachment to school based on the amount of victimization they received in school and online. The negative school experiences contributed to poor academic achievement. In addition, Hughes (2014) completed a scholarly review of studies in education, child and adolescent development, psychology, and speech-language pathology and found that over the course of their school careers, students who were bullied were at a higher risk for lower academic performance. Hughes further asserted that students who view school as unsafe cannot learn effectively due to increased anxiety levels about being bullied, which led to poor academic achievement.

Addressing the critical issue of bullying through the processes of PLC may help teachers and administrators create a school climate where students feel safe in the learning environment. In a quantitative study, Juvonen, Wang, and Espinoza (2010) found a direct correlation between peer victimization and compromised academic functioning when he used student self-report and peer nomination surveys, report cards, and a teacher survey to assess victimization and the link to academics. The study concluded that bullying consistently affected academic performance throughout the 3-year period in middle school.

Bullying in the Educational Setting

Olweus (1993) often considered the founding father of bullying research, began studying the topic of bullying in the early 1970s in his native country of Norway. He

defined bullying or victimization in the following way: “A student is being bullied or victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students” (Olweus, 1993, p. 9). In addition, Farrington and Ttofi (2009) defined bullying as an imbalance of power and repetitive acts, and Garrett (2003) defined it as words and actions that are unwanted and can make someone feel inadequate. Garrett also noted that this behavior could generally be distinguished by the way the recipient feels. Meyer-Adams and Conner (2008) described bullying as, “threats or intimidation; verbal cursing, teasing, or both; stealing passively or by force; and physical attacks” (p. 211). Within the school setting, this type of behavior can have a negative effect on academic performance.

Although the term bullying may have similar definitions, the expanse of bullying behavior has changed over the years. Olweus (1993) discussed the study he conducted in 1983 with a large group of approximately 568,000 primary and middle school students. He estimated that 15% were involved in bullying and/or victim situations. At the time of the study, he found bullying was taking on more serious forms and was more prevalent than it had been 10 to 15 years previously. Organizations such as the National Center for Education Statistics (2013) have more recently reported that 28% of youth, ages 12 to 18 years, in the United States have been bullied at school. Overall, the statistics above represent an increase of 13% during this timeframe alone.

In addition, since the time of Olweus’ study in 1993, Owusu, Hart, Oliver, and Kang (2011) conducted a study on the amount of bullying in senior high schools in West Africa. Students responded to survey questions regarding their experiences with bullying

in high school, which were divided into age groups. Overall, the research indicated that 40% of the students reported being bullied within the 30 days preceding the survey. Frisen, Jonsson, and Persson (2007) also conducted a study on the amount of bullying and victims in a high school in Sweden. Students responded to survey questions regarding their experiences with bullying throughout all of their school years, which were divided into four periods. The research found that 39% of students reported they had been involved in bullying at some point during their time in school. A study conducted by Jankauskiene, Kardelis, Sukys, and Kardeliene (2008) reported that 56.5% of the 1,162 Lithuanian students were involved in bullying. The above studies demonstrate a high percentage of bullying incidents in schools throughout the world, which may have negative effects on students.

Because bullying is prevalent in the educational setting, a deficit in academic performance may be regarded as a possible effect of bullying. Juvonen et al. (2010) conducted a quantitative study of 2,300 ethnically diverse students from 11 public middle schools in an urban area of Los Angeles. The students were given a peer victimization survey to assess self-perceptions of victimizations by peers. The findings reported the victims' self-perceptions were consistently correlated with academic indicators. Students with a stronger self-perception of being bullied were not only rated by their teachers as having a lower level of academic engagement, they were also likely to obtain lower grades. In addition, there was a connection between grade point averages and teacher-ranked academic engagement with bullying, as the students who were bullied more often tended to receive lower grades and participated less in academic responsibilities than did

other students. Overall, the findings demonstrated strong, direct correlations between peer victimization and decreased academic performance over the 3-year period.

In another study, Beran, Hughes, and Lupart (2008) researched other aspects of bullying and academic achievement when they used data from a sample of 2,084 students from a national survey of children in Canada. Researchers examined student responses to questionnaires regarding self-experiences of being bullied. Information concerning student conscientiousness and work habits was derived from teacher responses, along with the factors of school enjoyment and parental support. By examining a variety of variables within this study, researchers increased their understanding of bullying by indicating a connection between a student's social and academic functioning. Although a greater deficit occurred with students if they did not enjoy school, were not conscientious of their work, or if they did not have parent support, the main results indicated that victims of bullying obtained low levels of achievement.

Interest was raised about the lower level of academic performance and resulted in an additional study by Thijs and Verkuyten (2008) to further examine the relationship between peer victimization and academic achievement. They conducted a study of 1,895 ethnically diverse students in sixth grade, from 81 primary schools in the Netherlands. Students were assessed in a variety of areas during the second half of sixth grade. Thijs and Verkuyten (2008) used various measures to assess the students' self-perception of peer victimization, self-efficacy, achievement, depressed affect, and self-esteem. The self-perception of peer victimization was assessed regarding teasing, name-calling, and group exclusion, and Harter's (1988) Self-Perception Profile for Adolescence was

adapted to test the perceived academic self-efficacy. The Willig Scales (Burns, 1979), an 11-step scale to mark the perceived academic position in the class determined relative achievement. Students were asked to rate their achievement and learning in language and math. Self-reported teacher advice, based on student test scores, constituted an absolute achievement. Questions regarding sadness, nervousness, and fear determined the depressed effect while the Rosenberg (1965) Self-Esteem Scale indicated the students' perceptions of self-esteem.

The analysis of this data revealed that victimization had negative effects on perceived academic self-efficacy and relative and absolute achievement. Students who reported more experience with victimization had lower levels of achievement and were influenced by perceptions of lower academic self-efficacy. The overall findings and interpretation are consistent with theory and other studies connecting victimization as a cause of low achievement.

Bullying not only affects grades for individual students, it can also affect the more global aspects of education, such as high-stakes testing. In a study conducted by Hazel (2010), fourth grade students and teachers, as well as administrators and psychologists, from a U.S. suburban elementary school, participated in unstructured, open-ended interviews. A number of bullying incidents were occurring while the teachers were unaware that they were taking place. The teachers were focused on meeting district and state academic expectations on achievement tests, and attention to the emotional and safety needs of the students was limited. The bullying caused students to feel unsafe at school and affected their ability to be in class and learn. In fact, all students involved in

the study stated that bullying was the basis for their inability to concentrate in class. The study showed the cyclic effect on bullying and high-stakes testing as students cannot stay focused on the academics in the classroom while thinking about a threat or bullying situation from recess, therefore, causing a negative effect on their performance.

In addition to academic performance, Nakamoto and Schwartz (2009) reported that there is substantial evidence linking bullying to negative psychosocial outcomes such as depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, loneliness, and other forms of internalized distress. Although psychosocial effects may be more subtle than others, they can be more profound and last longer.

Perceptions of Bullying and School Safety

Student perceptions. Much of the research on bullying has been dedicated to scrutinizing the students' perception of bullying. A student's feeling of safety at school can affect aspects of their education. Bachman, Gunter, and Bakken (2011) found that not only can the capacity for learning diminish and academic performance be affected by bullying, students who are fearful at school may not participate in class, and in fact, may stay home from school to avoid a bully. The study used the Delaware School Survey with 20,138 fifth, eighth, and 11th grade students. The anonymous, self-administered questionnaire asked about areas such as fear, victimization, bullying, school rule enforcement, and substance use. The analysis of the data concluded that students at schools with a higher level of bullying, even after personal situations were under control, perceived greater levels of fear. Overall, prior victimization significantly increased the students' fear level at school for males and females across all grade levels.

The fear level of students can also be magnified by the prevalence of bullying and can have an effect on student health and well-being. Cowie and Oztug (2008) noted that because young people have mentioned that bullying or peer relationships may alter their perception of school safety, it is important to take into account students' viewpoints on bullying. They conducted a study regarding student perceptions of safety at school with 931 students between the ages of 11 and 15 years from four secondary schools in a small rural town. The students were surveyed using a school climate questionnaire that asked three open-ended questions about safety. The responses were coded into two categories: places where students felt safe or unsafe and reasons for feeling safe or unsafe. The responses indicated that the most frequent reason for feeling unsafe was bullying, although the students felt safer when others were around, especially during a lesson with a teacher present. Students suggested school would become a better place if bullying was reduced or stopped.

Student perception of safety and connection to the school can also play a role in the level of peer victimization. O'Brennan and Furlong (2010) conducted a study of middle and high school students utilizing data from the CHKS. They concluded that a student's perceived level of connection with others at the school was directly related to the amount of bullying and victimization. The relationships that adults build and maintain with students can have a positive effect on the amount of victimization, and therefore, foster a safe climate at school.

Bullying perspectives from varying viewpoints at the school, including, teachers, administrators, counselors, and students were examined in a two-part study conducted by

Rigby and Bagshaw (2003). In the first survey, students, averaging 14 years of age, completed two surveys. One survey asked 7,091 students if they thought the teachers at the schools were interested in putting a stop to bullying, and whether or not the teachers and students should work together to put a stop to bullying. The survey revealed that 40% of students thought that teachers were not really interested in stopping bullying. Further, 49% of male students were of the opinion that there should be a collaborative effort to stop bullying while 57% of female students were in favor of working together. The students on the younger end of the average age were more willing to work with the teachers at the school than their older counterparts of the study.

In the second part of Rigby and Bagshaw's (2003) survey, students were asked about their perceptions on the effect teachers were able to make on the issue of conflict between students. The results indicated that less than half of the students felt the teachers were not helpful in addressing conflict. Approximately 20% of the students felt that teachers actually made the matter worse when trying to intervene. Overall, 40% of the students believed that the teachers had a negative effect on dealing with bullying issues. The study found that the credibility of the teachers' ability to effectively handle bullying situations needed to be increased in order for students to want to collaborate with them. The study concluded that although some schools have recognized the need and established anti-bullying measures, and others have created laws to reinforce the rules, there is a relatively small amount of training to assist teachers in developing the skills to handle the bullying issues that arise in the classroom, and leaving students to feel unsafe. The Rigby and Bagshaw (2003) study demonstrated the students' perceptions of the need

for teachers to be trained in bullying intervention to foster a safe climate at school.

Teacher perceptions. In addition to teacher training, Bauman and Hurley (2005) assessed teachers' perceptions and beliefs about bullying. The literature review conducted in the study showed that teachers and staff at schools tend to feel they are more effective in dealing with bullying than the students perceive them to be. In the first part of the study, 95 teachers at eight schools in two school districts answered a 34-item questionnaire. The second part of this study included 93 first-year teachers in five school districts that answered a questionnaire and were interviewed and observed. Overall, 89% of teachers felt that helping students deal with bullying issues was part of their job. Although teachers wanted to be able to assist students in bullying situations, "only 19% of teachers agreed that their teacher training programs provided adequate preparation for dealing with bullying" (p. 57). The majority of the teachers (79%) in both studies would like more training on how to effectively deal with bullying situations. In addition to this finding, the discussion included information regarding bullying and its relationship with school climate. Teachers tended to underestimate the amount of bullying occurring at a school site and therefore, did not realize how the students perceived the school climate. This study recognized that training for teachers is essential, without which teachers are likely to be ineffective or overconfident in their ability to deal with bullying situations.

To gain further understanding of teachers' perspectives on bullying and professional development, Nicolaides, Toda, and Smith (2002) examined the knowledge and attitudes about bullying in teacher trainees. This study consisted of a questionnaire given to 270 students in one of three teacher-training programs. The teachers were asked

about the importance of bullying as an issue, and the responses indicated that only 58% said that it was very important. Teachers were also asked about their general knowledge of bullying, and their strategies for dealing with it as a teacher. Although most teachers had some basic knowledge of bullying and what to do if presented with the situation, many areas indicated that teachers were unaware of the severity and amount of bullying in schools today. The information from this study included that the trainee teachers recognized that bullying is an issue more than their veteran teacher counterparts, and wanted more information and training on the subject. The trainee teachers clearly saw their role as important in dealing with bullying issues at school, however, felt that more materials and information were necessary for the teacher training programs to give them the confidence needed to increase their knowledge base and effectiveness.

Professional Development within a Professional Learning Community

There are a variety of forms of professional development in the education field, and finding the most effective method to help teachers flourish, with the knowledge they need to improve their practice, can be a difficult task. Tohill (2009) found that professional development should include inquiry-based learning and research, which encompasses asking questions, gaining new perspectives through observation, synthesizing information, and drawing conclusions. This approach allows teachers to be included in the decision making process, provide feedback to one another about teaching in the classroom, as well as opportunities to reflect, discuss, and exchange ideas. Tohill (2009) said that professional development within the job of teaching should be coherent and ongoing to develop the support and understanding for integrating a learning-based

community.

Establishing a partnership for teachers to learn has directed many school districts to shift the focus of professional development to PLCs. The concept of community in professional development encompasses collaboration and inquiry to assist with establishing a decision-making and problem-solving environment. Chou (2011) conducted a study of in-service elementary English teachers to research the extent of how a PLC can contribute to a teachers' professional development. The participants chose an action research topic and presented the findings within the context of a learning community. The teachers met to share and reflect on teaching practices while using one another's videos of actual teaching in the classroom as a framework for reflection and discussion. The findings from this study indicated a PLC could be an effective platform for teachers to collaborate, share knowledge, and garner information from one another based on individual teaching practices.

Constructing a platform addressing the critical issues of bullying within the processes of a PLC involves building a level of trust amongst the teachers, students, and administrators in a school. Leaders who can provide the resources for teachers to form goals, and the time to collaborate to achieve them, can assist in this process. Although teachers are accountable to the administrators of the schools, they can take more of a leadership role and collaborate to establish a culture of trust, and to provide a safe learning environment for students. Teachers within a PLC who are focused on school culture and school climate may encourage other teachers to effectively manage bullying situations and possibly have a positive effect on student feelings of safety at school.

Prevention and Intervention

Knowledge of prevention and intervention programs and strategies and students' perceptions regarding their use is important for teachers to understand to effectively handle bullying situations and address student feelings of safety at school. Crothers, Kolbert, and Barker (2006) conducted a study regarding middle school students' preferences for antibullying interventions. The study asked 285 middle school students about their preferences in antibullying programs. Many intervention programs are based on former research done by Olweus (1993) and the models were used for topics of discussion in the more current study. Determining the course of action that works best for both teachers and students can be difficult and, Crothers et al. (2006) remarked that although there are a variety of studies regarding the types of bullying intervention programs that have shown positive results, there is minimal research on the strategies that students would like for educators to use. The results of this study concluded that students believed that the most effective type of intervention occurred when teachers intervened in bullying situations. The students also felt that telling parents and other nonteaching staff could be another means of effective intervention. The results of the study supported the use of comprehensive bullying prevention programs that emphasized professional development to rely on teachers to prevent bullying.

A study completed by Harris and Hathorn (2006) surveyed middle school principals in Texas to find out the occurrence of bullying and intervention strategies at their schools. It was indicated that the principals all perceived their school campuses to be safe. However, the research also suggested that some teachers feel school staff is not

taking steps to decrease bullying and teachers are unsure how to handle the bullying situations as well. The researchers felt that a greater concern was the conclusion that students did not believe teachers or administrators would address a bullying issue if they saw it happening. All of the Texas middle school principals surveyed were in agreement that there is a need for staff training, teacher discussion on bullying with their classes, and more vigorous monitoring on their campuses with regard to bullying.

Waasdorp, Pas, O'Brennan, and Bradshaw (2011) studied the perceptual differences among students, parents, and school staff in relation to bullying and intervention. The data for this study was obtained from a large school district of more than 11,000 students, over 1,000 staff members, and 960 parents. Staff, parent, and student attitudes, experiences, and perceptions of bullying and how it was handled were examined through a web-based survey. The results indicated that the staff reported a greater feeling of school safety than students, and more often reported incidences of bullying when they were witnessed.

Students, staff, and parents had an overall concern regarding bullying at the school site. The findings from the Waasdorp et al. (2011) study suggested that prevention and intervention efforts focused on school safety and climate should be provided for all school staff. A prevention program involving staff, students, and parents might assist teachers and administrators with communication that would decrease the number of bullying incidences. Olweus (1993) argued that professional development focused on bullying, along with policy changes, will likely assist staff in providing a more effective intervention method for dealing with bullying situations.

Limber (2011) conducted a review of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP), originally developed in the early 1980's by Dan Olweus, who is often referred to as the founding father of bullying research. The program focuses on school, classroom, individual, and community level components designed to reduce bullying incidents and improve peer relationships at school. The program contains a questionnaire to evaluate students' attitudes and experiences with bullying and includes training for members of the school community, including, teachers, administrators, staff, parents, and in upper grades, students. The group of committee members meets regularly to discuss bullying issues at the school. Administrators, teachers, and staff are trained to address bullying issues with immediate attention, along with follow up meetings with those involved. Teachers also hold weekly classroom meetings to build community and discuss bullying rules and issues to help students understand the roles they play in a bullying situation.

The preliminary assessment of the OBPP in Norway showed a 62% reduction in students' self-reports on being bullied in the first 8 months of the program. A 33% reduction in the amount of bullying others was also recorded during this period. Overall, the students' self-reports showed their perceptions of the school climate was positive.

Another program, Steps to Respect, was the focus of a study by Frey, Hirschstein, Edstrom, and Snell (2009), in which students in third- through sixth-grade in six elementary schools in the Pacific Northwest were provided with materials and training. Antibullying policies and processes to handle bullying were developed in the intervention schools. Teachers taught skills lessons for students from the program while students were observed on the playground and in classroom situations. The results of this study

indicated that a comprehensive intervention program could interrupt the usual increase in the amount of bullying at a school site.

In a study conducted by Hirschstein, Edstrom, Frey, Snell, and MacKenzie, (2007), the relationship between teacher implementation of the Steps to Respect bullying program and student outcomes for one year were examined. The study included 859 third- through sixth-grade students within one school district who received instruction from teachers trained in the bullying curriculum. The study found that students involved in the program and receiving lessons by the trained teachers showed a decreased amount of aggression, victimization, and provocation of bullying (Hirschstein et al., 2007). The research also indicated that schools should take the initiative to survey students to gather data to give to school employees, and use the information to guide a bullying intervention program to foster a safer school environment.

Jenson, Brisson, Bender, and Williford (2013) examined the effects of another bullying prevention program called Youth Matters. A sample of 876 students in Grades 4, 5, and 6 was used to assess the effects of Youth Matters, a prevention program based on curricular lessons on skills that support positive relationships between students and teachers and promote a safe school community.

The results of the survey used to assess the effectiveness of the program showed that students who were bullies, victims, and bully-victims were more likely to be uninvolved in future situations than those that were not a part of the prevention program efforts. Because part of the curriculum focuses on preventing and coping with bullying behaviors, victims of bullying showed the most positive results.

Implications Including Social Change

Social change will be addressed in this study by promoting the social and academic well-being of students and, therefore, having a positive effect on the school and community. A community of practice will be helpful following this study as it is important to get a group of interested teachers, parents, and administrators involved. This group can help to identify current issues within the school and work together to establish the most important components of a comprehensive antibullying program.

In a larger context, the research study can affect students and teachers in other school districts. Providing teachers resources and training in a bullying prevention and intervention program can produce a positive social change for students everywhere by decreasing the amount of bullying occurring at schools, while in turn, increasing the student feelings of safety. The processes of a PLC can assist teachers and administrators by providing a platform to discuss bullying prevention and intervention programs, as well as strategies to handle bullying situations.

Conclusion

Section 2 provided information regarding the study components, as well as the research to substantiate the reasons and outcome for the study. The review of the literature regarding PLCs and the benefits this type of collaboration can have on addressing bullying, school safety, and school climate were discussed. The importance of teacher collaboration to establish a culture of trust and a culture of change to address critical issues like bullying was outlined, along with an overview of the need for and success of various prevention and intervention programs and strategies.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

There is a problem in a local K–8 school, in which fifth- and seventh-grade students expressed in the CHKS that they feel unsafe. I investigated student feelings of safety and bullying through the use of qualitative research. Merriam (2009) defined *qualitative research* as the study of the interpretation and meaning of experiences that people have constructed in their world. In light of this definition, a qualitative approach is an appropriate choice for this study because it gained meaning from the teacher and administrator experiences with bullying. Yin (2009) suggested the research design is the correlation between the data collection, the conclusions drawn, and the research questions. The specific type of research design is a case study to investigate the topic of bullying and the perceptions of teachers and administrators on this issue. Yin described a case study as a practical inquiry into a current phenomenon within a real-life setting. In this case study, I examined the problem of fifth- and seventh-grade students at a California suburban school not feeling safe, as expressed in the CHKS. The qualitative design allows the topic to be studied within the context of where the phenomenon is occurring because the teacher and administrator interviews occurred at the school site.

Research Design

The research design for this study was a case study. Yin (2009) described that the components of the inquiry to examine when making the decision regarding the research design will depend on the type of research questions being asked, the nature of the phenomena being studied, contemporary or historical, and the control the researcher has

over behavioral situations. The research questions in this study, the contemporary nature of the phenomena, and the experiences of the teachers and administrators in addressing bullying situations with their students deem case study as an appropriate choice for this study. In addition, case studies are a commonly used method of research in the field of education. A qualitative case study is applicable for this research because the study is based on participant descriptions of events that are relevant to their world. In addition, I chose case study because participants were asked about their experiences with bullying within their own classroom and school, as well as the strategies they use to handle bullying situations. A detailed data collection process involving multiple sources of information (one-on-one interviews with eight middle school teachers and the principal and vice principal, public documents, and archived records) were used in this case study to gain a better understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

There are many advantages and disadvantages to different types of research design. Other likely choices for this study would be less effective for a few reasons. Creswell (2003) stated that quantitative research would rely on numerical data, and not allow for the researcher to discuss the issue within the context of the study; therefore, the perspectives of the participants about bullying could not be gained. In addition, this quantitative study examines the factors or variables that influence an outcome, and this particular study is not based on numerical data and does not have variables.

Another design that would not be effective for this study is phenomenology, because, phenomenology is not based on a problem. Hatch (2002) stated that phenomenology is an attempt to reveal the essence of individual experiences by asking

about the nature of the phenomenon. This study is based on a problem statement to investigate a contemporary context within the boundary of a particular K–8 school and therefore, could be better framed as a case study because case study investigates a problem. In addition, phenomenological research begins with the researcher's experiences. Although the research in the current case study is examining a phenomenon, it is not classified as phenomenology as I am not exploring an understanding of my personal experiences regarding bullying.

The qualitative case study method was used to address the research questions that are based on a problem that needs to be investigated. The amount of research that was conducted is within a bounded system, as there is a limit to the number of people involved in the study (Merriam, 2009). The bounded system, in this case, is the issue and concern regarding bullying, and information was pursued through a variety of avenues. Data from interviews, administrative discipline records, and public documents, such as schedules and bullying reports, were used to address the research questions within the case study.

Research Questions

The two central research questions that guided this study are derived from the problem statement and stated below.

1. How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators describe their responses to bullying incidents?
2. How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators describe the PLC processes they use to address the critical issue of bullying?

Context for the Study

A key idea in qualitative research is to purposefully select individuals or sites that help the researcher gain insight into the problem and address the research questions (Creswell, 2003). The context of this case study is a kindergarten through eighth-grade school in a suburban area in California where students have reported bullying situations. The school was chosen for the study because the district superintendent granted permission for me to conduct research.

The research site is a relatively large elementary and middle school with approximately 820 students. The demographics of the school population are 44% Caucasian, 30% Hispanic, 11% Asian, 6% African American, and 9% other (School Accountability Report Card, 2012). There are several similar K–8 grade schools in the area; therefore, the research site represents a typical sample, which reflects the average situation, person, or instance of the phenomena (Merriam, 2009).

Criteria for Selecting Participants

Creswell (2003, 2007) indicated that qualitative research should include a purposeful sampling of participants that best assist the researcher in understanding the problem and answering the research questions. The participants were current fifth- through eighth-grade teachers and the administrators at the research site, who have experience dealing with students who do not feel safe, and involvement in writing and addressing discipline referrals for bullying situations. The span of grades was selected based on the results of the CHKS in which fifth- and seventh-grade students expressed feeling unsafe at school. Hatch (2002) recommended that researchers interview a number

of participants to find out the information needed for the study. In this study, a total of 12 teachers in the middle school fit the criterion for this study, three each in Grades 5 through 8, there would not have been enough participants if the selection had been limited to fifth- and seventh-grades only. Also, during the time in which the researcher was a vice principal, a larger number of incidences occurred at the middle school level in fifth- through eighth-grades.

Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that interviewees should be knowledgeable and experienced in the area in which the researcher is studying, and should represent varying perspectives. The participants in this study were teachers from different subject areas, including at least one each from reading/language arts, math, science, and social studies to reflect various views. Moreover, two or three teachers from each grade, fifth through eighth, represented different aspects from a grade-level standpoint.

Ethical Protection of the Participants

I protected the privacy of all participants involved in this research study by using personal email addresses and telephones, assigning a pseudonym, storing materials in a locked cabinet at my home, and providing a private meeting space at the school for interviews. Yin (2009) illustrated that case study research specifically examines current phenomena in a real-life context, and therefore requires special care and sensitivity to ensure privacy. Participation in this research study was voluntary and teachers who chose to be involved were given a written statement to sign, outlining privacy and confidentiality, the credibility of the researcher, informed consent, and protection from harm. The consent form included the intent of research and participants were assured that

participation is voluntary (Hatch, 2002). The participants were also informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Creswell (2007) insisted that participants should be assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. I was the only one with the legend to show the names of the participants and the pseudonyms they have been assigned. The participants were not told who was taking part in the study. All of the data and study information were kept in a locked cabinet at my home. Privacy was also ensured by conducting the after school interviews in a private, locked conference room, in which no one else was present. Information from the interview was taped and transcribed before storing it in a locked file cabinet at my home. All electronic data were stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on a password-protected hard drive. Access to the transcribed interviews was only given to me, and I will keep the documents for a period of 5 years. In addition, the participants will have the right to request a copy of a 1- to 2-page summary of the results.

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

I sought access to the participants by scheduling a meeting with the superintendent of the school district, as well as the principal of the school, to explain the study, answer questions, and obtain their signatures on an approval letter and contact information for potential participants. Creswell (2003) emphasized that it is important to gain permission from the authority figures in the school district. After the superintendent and principal signed the proper district forms for permission to conduct research, Stake (1995) suggested a brief, written description of the case study plan, including the amount

of time and potential effects and outcomes, be given to all parties, as well as an offer to view a more extensive version of the study. This information was sent through personal email to potential participants. After 1 week, I sent a follow up email to see if a decision had been made. Teachers who expressed interest in participating in the study were also given the study plan, and the researcher, through personal email, requested the participant's acceptance into the study.

Role of the Researcher

In this case study, I sought to inform readers about middle school teachers' perspectives on student concerns that bullying may be an issue. Out of the 19 years of my teaching experience, 3 were spent at the research site as a vice-principal and one year as a fifth-grade teacher. I am no longer at this school, having been a professor at a community college for the last 6 years, and therefore, I do not have an authoritative position over any of the participants in the study.

The issue of bullying and school safety was brought to my attention while I was employed as a vice-principal and teacher at the school. As a vice-principal, bullying and its effects were observed on a regular basis, and the problem needs to be addressed for the sake of the students and teachers involved. My role was a former colleague conducting interviews with peer participants, without a leadership role at that school for more than 6 years.

Methods of Establishing a Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

In the role of researcher, I examined the perspectives of 8 fifth- through eighth-grade teachers, the principal, and the vice-principal on bullying and the PLC processes

they use to address critical issues. After a letter through email invited the interviewees, I contacted them by phone to establish a personal connection from the beginning. Rubin and Rubin (2005) found it is important to create a relationship within a conversational partnership to affect the process of interviewing. There are a variety of techniques to assist in establishing this role as a partnership. First, I explained my role in such a way that the interviewees could understand as they may have assigned one that may make the interviewing more difficult. Next, it was important that I demonstrated relaxation and was prepared to show interest and empathy about the subject of the interview. In addition, it was necessary to work on building a trusting relationship to help make the interviewee feel comfortable and protected.

Researcher's Experiences or Biases Related to the Topic

While a researcher may be passionate about the topic in which they are studying, it is important to examine any related biases or preconceived notions. Yin (2009) indicated that case study researchers need to pay special attention to this issue, as it is necessary to have an understanding of the problem beforehand. Because I was a vice-principal and a teacher at the school, familiarity with the procedures for handling bullying issues is present. Although protocols may have changed with a new principal and vice-principal, it was necessary for me to keep an open mind. It was also necessary to avoid succumbing to any preconceived notions by being open to all information and data provided by the participants in the interviews and hearing about what is being done now, as opposed to when I was employed at the school. It was also possible that during the interview, the participants would present contrary information. I ensured that this data

was used in the study. In studying bullying, I investigated how teachers and administrators address bullying incidents and used professional learning processes to discuss the issue. The results of the study can be used to have a positive effect on the professional development programs for educators in the areas of professional learning communities and bullying.

Data Collection Tools

I conducted semistructured, one-on-one interviews, with eight of the fifth- through eighth-grade teachers, the principal, and the vice-principal at the K–8 school as the primary mode of data collection. The interview protocol was developed using, "unstructured and generally open ended questions that are intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants" (Creswell, 2003, p. 188). There were 12 questions, with additional probes designed for participants to elaborate or elicit further information (Appendix B for teachers and Appendix C for administrators). The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour and took place after school, in a private and locked conference room at the school site.

The secondary method of data collection consisted of examining district and school documents and public records related to the research and the issue of bullying. Documents included, but were not limited to, the School Improvement Plan, the professional development plan, the CHKS, the Parent Information Handbook, and the Student Code of Conduct. Hatch (2002) observed that documents are a strong indication of the values within an institution and show an official written record of this type of activity. Current and past district and school policies on bullying and harassment to gain

a better understanding of how this type of behavior is handled by the administrators and teachers in the school was examined.

Archival records from the research site were also reviewed. Hatch (2002) held that records are a type of unobtrusive data that can show a different perspective or interpretation on their own, without the participants, and allow the researcher to make comparisons to the other types of data collected. School district public records pertaining to the number of suspensions during this timeframe were examined to investigate the possible connection between the offense and bullying. This information was matched with the transcriptions to see if there is a connection with how bullying has been handled in the classroom setting.

Data Collection Procedures

Yin (2009) advised using multiple sources of data as the first of three principles in collecting data for case studies. Data collection for this case study included interviews with teachers and administrators, member checking, public records, and documents such as bullying reports, professional development records, the School Improvement Plan, the CHKS, the Parent Information Handbook, and the Student Code of Conduct. Several sources can assist with developing converging lines of inquiry and corroboration and contribute to a more convincing and accurate conclusion. The interviews and public records provided various instruments from which to corroborate the teachers' and administrators' perspectives on bullying at the research site.

The second principle involved creating a case study database. It is important to organize and document the data in such a way that makes it presentable for other

researchers to review. The information in this case study was organized to assist in reporting the data obtained from the school site. The case study notes, in handwritten and typed form, were organized by major subjects within the study and were easily accessible. In addition, a bibliography of the documents and other materials examined in the case study was maintained.

Yin's (2009) final principle in data collection for case studies is maintaining a chain of evidence. The ability of the reader of the case study to follow evidence from research questions to conclusions, or from the conclusions back to the questions was accomplished by ensuring that all of the evidence in the case study report is the same information collected during the data collection process. For example, I gave specific information regarding citing documents, the time and place for an interview, and maintaining the continuity of the process from the data collection protocol. All three of Yin's principles are designed to make data collection an explicit process to show regard for construct validity and reliability to warrant further analysis.

Justification of Data Collection Choices for Case Study Research

There are various measures used in conducting research, such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and unobtrusive data. Because this case study addresses a problem related to bullying and student feelings of safety in a K–8 school, the data collection tools have been purposefully selected to address the research questions. Hatch (2002) demonstrated that interviews are used to explore experiences and interpretations, as well as to help explain and reveal the significance of other types of data collected. In this case study, the students who participated in the CHKS and expressed they felt unsafe,

have moved on to high school and therefore, cannot be observed. The teachers and administrators, on the other hand, offered insight as to their description of bullying incidents and how they are handled at the school. Yin (2009) maintained that interviews are a fundamental source in case study research because the research addresses human affairs or behavioral events and the informants can provide valuable insights. In addition to interviewing participants, I reviewed public record documents at the school site that are related to the issue of bullying. Yin (2009) asserted that in a case study, documents play a clear role in the data collection process. The documents examined in this case study were used to provide details that can corroborate information from other sources, such as the interviews.

Steps in the Data Collection Process

Month 1, Week 1: Prior to submission to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I sought consent from the district superintendent, as well as the school principal, by submitting a letter outlining the details of the research study and data collection procedures. When I received permission from school personnel and approval from the IRB, I contacted the prospective participants in the study through an email invitation. I outlined the details of the research study, sent a copy of the Informed Consent Agreement for prospective participants to review, and advised them that participation is voluntary and interviewees were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. I contacted, through a personal email, the principal, vice-principal, and teachers who agreed to participate in the interviews to arrange a day and time to meet at the school. Although the first attempt was a face-to-face interview, a contingency plan to meet at a private

location, convenient for the participant, was established if the participant was unable to attend a physical meeting.

Month 1, Week 2: During the arranged meeting date and time, I conducted semistructured interviews that lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour, after school dismissal, and in a private office with a locked door, so it was unlikely to have interruptions. If a participant was unable to meet after school on campus, I would meet at a private location, convenient for the participant. There was a list of preapproved, guiding questions (Appendix B for teachers and Appendix C for administrators) focused on the participants' descriptions of bullying incidences in the classroom and the processes of a PLC they use to address critical issues like bullying. Additional probing questions arose from the data collected in the interview. The interviews were recorded and I took written notes in case the recording equipment malfunctions (Creswell, 2003).

Month 1, Week 3: When the interviews were complete, I did the transcription by hand. The notes, audiotapes, and transcribed materials were stored in a locked file cabinet in my home during this time. When each participant's transcription was complete, I emailed the transcripts for them to check for accuracy and offered revisions of any changes, clarifications, and additions to the original interview. The transcribed interviews were sent to a personal private email address. A private phone interview was offered in an attempt to make the discussion of the reviewed transcription more convenient for the participant and this meeting was recorded and transcribed as well, and then sent to a personal private email address for member checking, and a follow up phone call. In either situation, I made all efforts to guard the participant's privacy and ensure confidentiality.

Month 1, Week 4: Public records, with regard to the issue of bullying, were examined. The district and school mission statements, the parent and student handbook, policies and procedures related to bullying and professional development schedules were surveyed to provide additional insight and information. In addition, the CHKS, along with the public discipline documents, were reviewed for correlativity.

Data Analysis

Analyzing data in a research study is an integral part of the search for meaning within the collected information. Hatch (2002) stated that analysis is a method of organizing and sifting through data that allows researchers to "see patterns, identify themes, discover relationships, develop explanations, make interpretations, mount critiques, or generate theories" (p. 148). In this case study, I used interpretive analysis to give meaning to the data. Interpretive analysis allows a researcher the opportunity to make sense of the social phenomena in which they are studying. I generated explanations for bullying that is occurring at the school site by making inferences to attach significance to the understandings, and draw conclusions from this information.

Transcription

Interviews with 8 fifth- through eighth-grade teachers, the principal, and the vice-principal at the research site, who fit the criteria for the case study, were conducted. Immediately following the one-on-one interviews, I transcribed the information from the tape recording device, and created a typed transcript, paying special attention to the words and gestures made by the interviewee. When the transcription was complete, I sent the document via email to the participants for member checking. In the email, I asked

them to check for discrepancies, additions, and changes, and then followed up with a phone call within the week to further clarify points, and ask additional questions as needed. Merriam (2009) argued that member checking is the most important way to ensure the researcher has not misinterpreted the information in the transcription. After the participants have the opportunity to revise and approve the interview transcription, I coded the transcripts to identify patterns, relationships, and themes derived from the guiding questions and answers in the interview. Hatch (2002) affirmed that patterns are consistencies in similarities, differences, causation, sequence, frequency, and correspondence, relationships are links between the elements of data and themes are integrated concepts that are run throughout the data.

Thematic Development and Coding Procedure

After transcribing the interviews, I used the process described by Rubin and Rubin (2005) to code and analyze the data in several stages. The first stage is to recognize the concepts, themes, events, and topical markers in the interview. The next step is to clarify and combine the identified concepts and themes to gain a greater understanding of the information. Once the themes are identified, the coding process begins. Creswell (2003) defined coding as a process used to organize the data from a transcription into categories, and labeling chunks of information with a term used by the participant called an *in vivo* term. A computer program, *Hyper Research*, was used to help me in the coding process to seek and identify five to seven themes in the interviews to answer the research questions. Themes should be supported by quotations, specific evidence, and contain a variety of perspectives from participants.

The interview transcriptions were carefully examined to identify the *in vivo* codes as appropriate, with the assistance of *Hyper Research* computerized coding software. Although this type of tool can be helpful in the coding process, Yin (2009) reminded researchers this is an assistant and case study requires much more analysis by the researcher than a computer can provide. As I reviewed the transcription, I compared the interviews to find common themes and concepts mentioned by the participants and the coding structure was derived from matching the codes to the purpose of the study. The codes were marked in the margins of the transcriptions and a computer file was created for each one for further review when finished. Hatch (2002) pointed out once this process is complete, it is necessary to decide if the categories are justified by the data.

Procedures for Dealing with Discrepant Cases

In this case study, interviews with 8 fifth- through eighth-grade teachers who fit the criteria, as well as the principal and vice-principal, were conducted. There are 12 eligible teachers, so if there was a need for someone to drop out of the study, there were others who could take their place. Since participation was voluntary, teachers could withdraw from the study without penalty. For example, if a participant could not fulfill the meeting or time obligations, or needed to go on medical leave, I would have asked one of the other eligible teacher volunteers to be a participant.

Methods to Address Validity and Trustworthiness

Member checking was used to ensure accuracy with the interview transcription. Hatch (2002) described the member checking process as a method of inviting interviewees to provide feedback on the interpretations to the researcher. A copy of the

transcribed interview was sent to each participant through a private email, and the participant was asked to review the material, make changes to the interview, and check results of the data for accuracy.

Internal validity and credibility can be ensured by the use of member checking, which Merriam (2009) described as,

> The single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed (p. 217).

Member checking allowed me to gain a more precise level of accuracy on the participants' perceptions and give the participants the opportunity to recognize their experience in my interpretation, review the results to reflect on their answers, and change, add, or clarify any key points made during the interview (Merriam, 2009).

Triangulation

Stake (1995) described triangulation as a process to keep misunderstandings and misinformation to a minimum. In this case study, a variety of data sources such as interviews with administrators and teachers, public documents, including district and school policies regarding bullying, professional development schedules, and the student code of conduct were used to triangulate the information to corroborate the findings. The interview transcripts were compared to public documents and the data was cross-checked. Yin (2009) described the rationale for using multiple sources of data, including interviews and documents, as the opportunity to address a wider range of behavioral

issues, as well as the development of converging lines of inquiry. He argued case study findings are much more convincing when a variety of sources are used. By interviewing eight teachers in four different grade levels, as well as both administrators, various perspectives were gained during the interviews.

Summary

This case study examined the problem of students feeling unsafe at a local K-8 school by the use of teacher and administrator interviews and public documents. In this section, I outlined the methods to be used for this qualitative research study and discussed the rationale and criterion for selecting the research site and the participants. I also included a description of how data was collected from interviews and public documents and explained the process of data analysis that occurred with the use of coding and member checking. In addition, Section 3 included how I addressed validity and trustworthiness of the study.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore regular education fifth- through eighth-grade classroom teachers' and administrators' descriptions and experiences in responding to bullying incidences in a K-8 school. The data in the study was collected through semistructured interviews with 2 fifth-grade self-contained classroom teachers, 1 sixth-grade English and science teacher, 1 seventh-grade English teacher, 1 seventh-grade science teacher, 1 seventh- and eighth-grade math teacher, 1 eighth-grade science teacher, 1 eighth-grade English teacher, and 2 administrators, including a principal and a vice-principal. One of the teacher participants had 2 years of experience, and the other seven teachers had 10 or more years of experience. The principal was in her first year as an administrator, and the vice-principal was in her second year.

In addition to interviews, additional data was provided through documents such as district and school policies and forms on bullying, the School Improvement Plan, the district parent and student handbook, and the CHKS requested from the school. The documents were used to corroborate findings and interpretations found in the interview data. Two research questions guided this qualitative case study:

1. How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators describe their response to bullying incidents?
2. How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators describe the PLC processes they use to address the critical issue of bullying?

The findings from the study revealed several themes regarding how bullying incidences were handled at the fifth- through eighth-grade level at the K-8 school site: Strategies and interventions for handling bullying situations, bullying prevention programs, school climate, collaboration with other teachers, teacher collaboration with administrators, and professional development related to bullying and bullying programs.

Generating, Gathering, and Recording Data

Process for Generating Data

Permission to conduct the study was obtained by contacting the superintendent of the school district and the school site principal. A Letter of Cooperation was signed and allowed me to conduct research in the K–8 school. Walden University and the Institutional Review Board granted approval to conduct research on May 4, 2015.

I requested a list of all fifth- through eighth-grade teachers from the principal and sent an email to invite them to participate, along with the consent form. Eight of the 12 possible fifth- through eighth-grade teachers, the principal, and vice-principal responded to the invitation and agreed to participate while four teachers did not reply. I arranged interview times through a personal email address with all ten participants. The general data associated with the participants is in Table 2.

Process for Gathering Data

I met with each teacher participant in a locked conference room during the scheduled day and time. I used the interview questions (Appendix B) as a guide and asked for each teacher to sign the consent form. The teacher interviews were completed within a 3-week period while the administrators requested to wait until the school year

ended when more time was available. I used the interview questions (Appendix C) as a guide and asked for each administrator to sign the consent form. All of the interviews took place in a locked office and were free from interruption. I assigned a pseudonym to each participant to protect his or her identity.

Table 2

Teacher and Administrator Participants

Participant (pseudonym)	Position	Years	Content Area(s)	Number of students
Ophelia	Principal	1	N/A	N/A
Willow	Vice-Principal	2	N/A	N/A
Cadence	5th grade	21	Multiple subjects	32
Garnet	5th grade	10	Multiple subjects	32
Abel	6th grade	10	English and science	150
Bailey	7th grade	11	English	150
Daisy	7th grade	12	Science	150
Caitlyn	7th/8th grade	2	Math	150
Bart	8th grade	17	Science	150
Ella	8th grade	12	English	150

Process of Recording Data

I used a digital recording device to audiotape the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. The audiotape from the recording device was downloaded onto my password-protected computer. I transcribed recordings using the assistance of the HyperTranscribe software program. The software program did not

complete the transcription, however, it allowed me to listen to the audio recordings 5 seconds at a time, with the control of the start and stop function on the keyboard. The digital recording device and the printed copies of the transcripts are stored in a locked cabinet in my home, and the transcriptions are stored on my password-protected computer to secure the data to further protect the identity of participants.

System of keeping track of data and emerging understandings.

I transcribed the interviews and printed copies of each for review. I read the transcribed documents several times to identify issues that participants discussed at length. I wrote notes in the margins of the documents and recorded topics and possible themes in a reflective journal. I also used the HyperResearch software program to assist with coding the interview transcripts. Based on the manual review of the transcript documents and the coding completed in the software program, several themes emerged regarding the strategies that teachers used to handle bullying situations in the classroom and how teachers used the processes of a PLC to address bullying in fifth- through eighth-grade. These will be discussed in the Findings section below.

Case Narrative for the Research Site

This bounded case study took place at one K–8 school with approximately 800 students. The small school district in California consists of one elementary school, one middle school, and two K-8 schools. Within this school, I concentrated on the fifth- through eighth-grade teachers and did not invite teachers from Kindergarten through fourth grade. The focal point was on the middle school grades because more than half of the fifth- and seventh-grade students' responses on the CHKS indicated they were

harassed or felt afraid at school. Because of the small number of teachers in fifth- and seventh-grade, I chose to include teachers from fifth- through eighth-grade.

Leadership Structure for the Research Site

The principal, Ophelia, was hired one year ago as a new administrator and is the leader at the school. The vice-principal, Willow, has been at the school for two years. Because the administrators are new to the school and working with one another, the majority of the duties on the school site are shared, and they meet every morning to update one another. Teacher support and evaluation, curriculum, and student support are three larger shared areas. Ophelia is a first-year principal and is new to the school site, so she chose to take an active role with Willow in the discipline process, and works with the teachers and students when behavior issues, such as bullying, arise. She stated, "Being a part of the discipline process has helped me to get to know the kids and parents on campus." Willow described the process for handling bullying situation as, "Teachers will email one or both of us to let us know if something is going on, and then whoever has the time to handle the situation at that moment, will follow up." If both administrators are off campus, Bailey, a seventh-grade teacher, holds an administrative credential and assumes the leadership role to handle discipline situations that may arise. The superintendent is in close proximity to all four schools in the district, and visits the school periodically to speak with administrators, teachers, and parents, and provides mentoring and advice when needed.

The Findings

Based on the information in the data collected from the interviews and a review of

public documents, themes emerged regarding current bullying strategies and intervention programs as well as the processes of a PLC. The following themes will be discussed in the findings: Strategies and interventions for handling bullying situations, bullying prevention programs, school climate, collaboration with other teachers, teacher collaboration with administrators, and professional development related to bullying and bullying programs. The findings are presented below each research question, followed by the relationship to the literature and finally, the relationship of all findings to the conceptual framework.

Research Question 1

The first research question for this study was: How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators describe their response to bullying incidents? All participants, including two administrators, and 8 fifth- through eighth-grade teachers, were asked what strategies they used to handle bullying situations in the classroom. Three of 10 participants first responded by emphasizing the safety of the victimized student as being their number one priority when a bullying situation arises, "A safe classroom environment that makes the students feel treated fairly is very important to me," said Caitlyn. Bailey felt that the role of the teacher is to be aware of the situation and ensure the safety of the victim first, and Ella stressed the importance of making students feel safe and letting them know that everything they say is in confidence.

The primary strategy shared by 7 of 8 teachers and administrators to address bullying situations was to get to the root of the issue by talking with students, both bullies and victims, to allow them the opportunity to share their side of the story. Garnet used the

strategy of having a conversation with a group of students outside of her classroom door after a break period, to help them resolve an issue. The strategy was helpful in dealing with short term situations from the playground, but then described it as an "almost everyday occurrence," so she decided to tell the students to work it out on their own, before reentering the classroom after break. The students stood outside the classroom door so she was able to supervise and listen to the conversation if needed.

Garnet later found this strategy was not successful as the students resorted to staying outside after every recess and lunch to discuss an issue and were missing valuable classroom time on a daily basis. The vice-principal then told the students they were not allowed to play together unless they could get along. Garnet said this meeting led to a realization for the group and was helpful in resolving their minor bullying issues. She also mentioned while issues seemed to be resolved, others quickly arose because of the amount of time they spent in close proximity.

Cadence determined the strategy of talking with students about bullying incidents is helpful in determining the cause of an issue. She tries to discover why a student is name-calling or participating in various bullying behaviors because she felt, "There's usually something else involved other than someone not liking another person. Finding the root of the problem, talking it out, and resolving it will hopefully help them learn in the future how to better handle it." During this process, she also focused on teaching her students how to better communicate their feelings. She practiced with such starting statements as, "I feel angry when…" or "You hurt my feelings when you…" to assist students with beginning the conversation and clearly making their point. Cadence made a

point of doing this because she has her students all day and can incorporate the lesson into a curricular area.

Daisy mentioned that sometimes students are just experiencing an issue with someone that one time, and therefore, may not be classified as bullying, so it is necessary to first find out if that is the case. If it is established as an ongoing issue and bullying is involved, then she felt her best strategy is to get the students together to have a conversation in her presence. She stated, "If the bully is willing to do it, then the one being bullied has to speak up, be strong enough and tell them to stop." She encourages students to be "straight up, open, and honest," about how they are feeling. Students are each given a chance to speak while the other is told to listen, so they both feel they are heard. Sometimes that requires coaching from Daisy, especially to the victimized student, but "it gives them the power to say what they feel they need to say to the bully, and oftentimes, that is to stop, and bullies need to know that is the main part of the message." Daisy also mentioned that victimized students do not always want to have a discussion with the bully, so she makes it clear to students that when they come to her to report a bullying incident, she will address the situation by bringing the bully into a discussion with the victim and the teacher.

Bailey said she usually finds out about a bullying situation because her students come in the classroom visibly upset after a break. In that case, she asks them to go outside with her to talk, separating them from the students in the classroom. While the rest of the class is working, she investigates a situation by calling students outside to find out exactly what happened. She mentioned her time is limited with the students, because

she only has them for one class period, so she has to assess the situation quickly. Based on the information she discovers in these interviews, she determines if the situation is serious enough that administrators need to become involved, or if she can handle the incident within the group.

Caitlyn, as a second year teacher, has not had to deal with bullying situations often but was strong in her opinions about what to do when a student might come to her with this information. “If a student approaches me and says this is happening, or if I see this happening, then I have an ethical responsibility and I definitely need to do something about it.” Her primary strategy is to talk with the students first to find out the details and then try to help them with a resolution. She also mentioned that this could present a safety issue for the student being bullied, so if that were the case, she would talk with the students individually. Caitlyn explained this process as “pulling the person who is doing the bullying off to the side and letting them know the behavior is disrespectful and not acceptable in her classroom.” She further expressed the need for bullies to understand how their victims feel, so she tries to reason with the bully in this manner. If Caitlyn was unable to resolve an issue and felt it was ongoing, she would bring it to the attention of the administrators through an email, followed by a conversation.

Ella has not been faced with a bullying situation firsthand, but when asked what she would do if she saw or heard of it happening, she said, “I would have to address it right then and there.” She explained it is important to get information from both sides involved and based on the severity; she would decide how to handle the issue. Her option of sending a student to the office would be determined by the seriousness of the actions,

and whether or not the situation was ongoing.

Bart addressed bullying situations with a meeting with the students, allowing them the opportunity to share how they feel. He mentioned a current bullying situation and would like for the girls involved to sit down and talk. “Tell her how you feel, and you tell her why you say those mean things. I don’t know if it will have an effect, but when it comes face-to-face, then it’s real.” On the other hand, Bart shared the lack of confidence in having students discuss the bullying incident as a face-to-face conversation. “The students might say this or make nice in here in front of me, but then they go away and say, you know what that little brat made me do?” He felt there would be no healing in the situation, but just enough discussion to satisfy the adult speaking to them during the meeting.

In addition to safety for the victims, the time it takes to have a conversation with students to discuss a bullying situation away from the other students can present a logistical issue with a class full of students inside the room. Three teacher participants mentioned speaking to the students was useful, but required too much time outside of the room, so they often ask all of the students involved in an incident to write the details down on paper to save some time. This additional step also allows the teachers time to review the incident to see all perspectives, identify any loopholes, ask questions, and distinguish the possible origin of the issue before the discussion takes place.

One of the administrator participants, Ophelia, conducted meetings with students in her office, but only after teaching them communication skills that may be helpful when discussing bullying situations with peers. She first works with the victimized students to

compose a script consisting of what they would like to say to the bully during a facilitated meeting. The victim is then prepared with words to express how they feel, such as, "When you say these things, it hurts me." Ophelia felt the victim could be empowered to have difficult conversations that could be helpful in students' lives if they are better prepared. "As adults, we have to be able to come to a table with someone and say, 'This is not okay when you treat me like this.'"

Providing students with various strategies to place in their toolbox "arms them with ways that they can fix the problem," Ophelia said. Demonstrating how to confront a bully during a situation can help students gain the skills to be polite and assertive in future situations. During this type of communication, Ophelia mentioned it was also important to demonstrate and practice tone of voice. She believed students should use a voice strong enough to let the bully know the gravity of the situation.

Willow discovered the assistive meetings are helpful and wanted students to know she is open in the conversations about the incidences. "I'm going to get the kids together to say this is how it made me feel. I empower the child to say what is on his or her mind." She helps students prepare an index card prior to the discussion so they are prepared with the main components to be covered in the meeting, and most importantly, to tell the bully how he or she feels and ask him or her to stop.

"Preparing students with the knowledge of what will take place in the meeting helps to put the voice in the child, and it's pretty powerful, and it's worked."

Willow also uses a writing strategy as a way for students to hear their perspective of the incident, prior to the meeting. When a bully writes about a bullying situation, she

reads the piece aloud to him or her to see if they can come to their own conclusion about their behavior and possible consequence of making poor choices. Another writing strategy she uses during a meeting with a victim and a bully is to get a large piece of paper and ask students to fill it up with commonalities. Willow felt this helps to create a connection between those involved. “Oftentimes, students don’t realize how much they have in common with other students, and when this is made evident, it helps students to see one another differently.”

The hope of talking it through and resolving a situation is not without assistance from the teachers and administrators. All 9 of 10 participants that used this strategy felt it was necessary to teach the students how to communicate properly when expressing their feelings in a meeting with a bully. Although they had various methods of accomplishing this goal, the end result was to discuss a bullying situation with the students involved, to come to a resolution.

The literature on this particular finding presents a variety of viewpoints. Morgan (2012) presented the importance of teacher intervention in dealing with bullying situations. In fact, bullies may have the perception that if an adult does not intervene, this may act as a permit to continue the behavior. In accordance with the 9 of 10 participants in this research study that used this strategy, Lund, Blake, Ewing, and Banks (2012) found that having a conversation or meeting with students involved in a bullying situation to be the most widely used intervention. The study cited that the majority of school personnel used the strategy of talking to students, both victims and bullies, helped them to understand the situation. Based on this discussion, the practitioner could then decide

on the best method of intervention.

Rigby (2011) conducted a study that reviewed effective intervention methods. The study was based on strategies used once the situation is identified as bullying. One concept he studied was restorative practice, which is defined as, "The approach that involves getting the offender to reflect upon his or her unacceptable behavior, experience a sense of remorse and act to restore a damaged relationship with both the victim and the school community" (p. 278). This practice generally takes place during a meeting with the victim and the bully and includes all parties involved in the bullying situation. For restorative practice to be successful the bully should feel remorseful about the incident and the victim should be ready to accept an apology, so both parties can work towards a resolution. Sometimes success was reported with this strategy, however, the evidence for its effectiveness in the reduction of bullying incidences is deficient.

Similarly, Bradshaw (2013) expressed concerns about this method in her study on effective bullying intervention strategies. The researcher found the complexity of bullying and the nature of individual situations regarded some interventions as less effective or potentially harmful to the students involved, particularly victims. Meetings conducted with both bullies and victims present insinuate a disagreement between students of equal status or power, foregoing the presence of peer abuse. In addition, face-to-face conversations with bullies and their victims can possibly cause additional emotional pain to the victim.

The potential hurt caused by a conference with the students involved in a bullying situation was also found by Cortes and Kochenderfer-Ladd (2014). The study was based

on children's influences on their decision to report a bullying incident. The perceptions of students in the teacher responses to a situation were evaluated and it was determined that children worry about being demoralized by their peers for reporting bullying. Moreover, students were even more fearful if a bully was punished in response to their report of the incident.

Another strategy mentioned by 9 of 10 participants was the scripted Second Step program that was developed to support school success, connectedness, and a safe and respectful climate, and was adopted by the district approximately 8 years ago. The K–5 program focuses on lessons for learning empathy, managing emotions, and solving problems. The Grades 6–8 program contains all of the units in the K–5 curriculum and inserts information geared toward bullying prevention and intervention, substance abuse prevention, and goal setting.

Ella said the program gives a frame of reference or knowledge of buzzwords in relation to emotions and conflict. She felt students are more conscientious about using words, such as bullying, in the right context and seem to better recognize situations when they arise. Ella also mentioned that by teaching all students the same set of words helps them to express emotions, gain a better understanding of a situation, and articulate a more focused plan for resolution.

On the other hand, Bart commented that boys don't like the program because, "they think it is more classwork, with worksheets to fill out." Willow called Second Step a character education program that is, "outdated, and needs updating." Ophelia mentioned it needed to be streamlined so all grade levels at the school are focusing on a similar topic

at the same time.

The teachers and administrators expressed different viewpoints on the frequency and use of the program. Cadence and Garnet both stated that they are supposed to use the program once a week, but that rarely happens due to time constraints and other content area curriculum taught during the day. Abel said he used the program one time per week, for a 45-minute period. Bailey mentioned that although there is a set schedule for two times per month, "the program has kind of been shoved to the side," while Bart expressed he does not use the program on a regular basis and has only tried it one or two times. In contrast, both administrators thought the program was being used consistently once per month in seventh and eighth grade, and once per week in fifth and sixth grade.

Participants were also asked about the level of effectiveness of the Second Step program when used to address bullying situations. Abel started his answer to the question with, "Yea, it's working, they like it," and after discussion about students who are already empathetic seemingly enjoying the program the most, while those that need empathy training are probably not paying attention, ended the conversation with, "I don't know if it is helping. I would be skeptical." Daisy responded with, "I do feel like it has been beneficial, at least for the girls," adding that this is, "probably because the program is discussion-based and in a social forum." In a similar gender-related response, Bart commented, "For boys, the program is absolutely worthless."

A common discussion among three teacher participants was the idea that the students seemed to enjoy the role-playing and know the steps of the program, but they do not see the application of the principles in dealing with bullying on the playground or

other areas outside of the classroom. Bailey was unsure about the effectiveness of the program while three of the eight teacher participants were adamant that the program is not effective at all. Garnet mentioned she taught Second Step every week to her fifth graders at the beginning of the school year, and emphasized the components of the program to the students every day, but she still saw the same bullying issues, with little to no improvement.

Both administrators felt the program allowed students and teachers the opportunity to talk openly about bullying issues and felt Second Step did, "a pretty good job at that." One administrator, Willow, saw a gap in how the students interacted and treated one another, so it prompted the teachers and administrators to pay closer attention to how the program was being administered. The result included the administrators asking K–6 grade levels to teach the program one time per week, allowing the teachers to work this time into their current curricular schedule. I interviewed three participants from the fifth and sixth grade that tried to work the program in one time per week, but without a reserved time slot, it was often canceled to accommodate the content area curriculum. All three of the teacher participants in the fifth and sixth grade felt it would be easier to incorporate the Second Step program if there was a designated, protected time slot comparable to the junior high. The school set an assembly schedule at the beginning of the year for seventh- and eighth-grade students, providing a designated time for Second Step to be taught once a month. The schedule has a protected time slot for social groups, and rather than cancel a class, they shortened the content area courses so as not to take away from academic instruction.

The time in this schedule was referred to as a social group period for seventh- and eighth-grade students and was intended to provide teachers and other staff members the time to meet with small groups of students to discuss bullying and other issues. Boys and girls are separated by gender and grade level and placed into groups with a seventh- or eighth-grade teacher, an administrator, or the intervention specialist. The idea was that if students were having a social issue, they would feel more comfortable to express concerns within a smaller, gender-specific group within their grade level. Bailey said, "If there's any bullying going on, it'll come up in that type of environment where they feel safe."

Cadence mentioned the original program "was set up to handle girl belittling and the boy issues that were going on." Last year, the administrators and teachers decided to form smaller groups to help students feel more comfortable to discuss current social issues, such as bullying. Daisy said, "I have a group of 15 seventh-grade boys right now, and the vice-principal and the intervention coordinator each have a group of boys as well." In the eighth grade, one of the male teachers decided to meet with all eighth-grade boys, while the eighth-grade girls were split into three groups. Willow described the thought process behind the decision to break up into smaller groups because "deeper discussion is possible."

Initially, it was up to teacher discretion as to the topics that were discussed during social groups. Bailey used this time to address bullying and other issues such as how to be an ally and how to deal with conflict and anger. Ophelia mentioned that the idea of having groups meet in this organic type fashion can be helpful in some sense, but was

less structured and she was concerned that parents were not aware of what was being discussed. The administrators felt the teachers needed some guidance for use during this time, so rather than having a more open social group, the time was instead supposed to focus on bullying prevention and character education, utilizing the Second Step program.

In addition to Second Step, all 10 of the participants mentioned other programs available at the school to help students learn about bullying and positive behavior. Three years ago, four teachers and an administrator began the PAWS (Positive Action with Support) committee, designed to establish school rules and expectations, as well as a school wide character recognition program. The PAWS approach was to reward good behavior, to decrease bullying and other negative behaviors at school. When students are caught in the act of a positive behavior or going above and beyond for their peers, they earn a ticket from a school staff member. On the back of the ticket, the adult writes what the student was doing when they received the ticket. The tickets go into a drawing and students are recognized for their positive behavior in the cafeteria during lunch. The students then have the opportunity to spin a wheel and earn a prize.

Both administrators and one teacher participant felt this program is a positive system to reward students. Two junior high teacher participants mentioned the need to incorporate recognition into a more school-wide approach. Cadence felt the entire school could focus on one character trait a month, for instance, empathy or honesty, with all classrooms working on that attribute at the same time. She added the school could hold a K–8 assembly each month to celebrate the good character demonstrated by students throughout the month. Cadence believes this type of program "would change the culture

here at school amongst the kids."

Garnet and Cadence discussed DARE (Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education) training that all fifth-grade students received one time per week for a 10-week period. The information taught in this program used to be focused solely on drugs and alcohol, but last year began including a bullying component. In these modules, they learn the definition of bullying, what it is and is not, ways to report it, and ideas on what students can do in bullying situations. Garnet stated, "I think for some kids it works, but the day they learned about bullying in DARE in my classroom, I had a bullying problem with students."

In addition to the PAWS and DARE programs, the school uses a daily motivational message to further promote positive behavior. The morning announcements are made by the principal and include current events as well as words of wisdom, in the form of a quote and an explanation. For example, one administrator mentioned that a message could be directed toward being nice to everyone because no one knows what difficult issue an individual may be dealing with on any given day. The other administrator further clarified that the message focuses on positive behavior and character education, and one teacher participant thought they could, "potentially use them in the class and revisit them," to help foster daily conversations.

The Tribes Learning Community was another character education program mentioned by one participant during the interviews. The program was used in the school district several years ago, and few of the teachers that were trained in the curriculum are still at the school site. Cadence found this program to be beneficial because students had

to “put their emotions behind what they were saying.” The program facilitated a large amount of whole group discussion, and practice in how to communicate was often the focus during a classroom meeting, where all students had the opportunity to talk about their feelings. An “I Feel” statement opened the discussion for students while others practiced how to respond to these messages. She felt this program could help students deal with bullying situations, and provide further instruction on how to converse with teachers, administrators, and other students if an issue arises.

Three participants, including both administrators and one eighth-grade teacher, discussed another program currently being used at the school site called, Young Men’s Leadership. This group was started by one of the male eighth-grade teachers several years ago. He began by focusing on a small group of eighth-grade boys, some of whom were having difficulty in academics, not making good behavior choices, or bullying others, and concentrated on enhancing their leadership skills to promote more positive performance. The students were given the option to attend a meeting with the teacher at lunch to have an open dialogue about any academic, behavior, or personal issues the students wanted to discuss.

The students talk about various issues, but oftentimes, serious discussions about bullying, feelings and emotions, school, and difficult family situations arise. “When the boys open up about how they are feeling regarding a situation, whether it be bullying or academics, it is powerful. Other boys can relate and they feel like they are not alone.” In addition to student discussion and meetings, the teacher provides volunteer opportunities such as preparing materials for the special education class, setting up chairs, helping

teachers move furniture, or offering to tutor after school. The program has grown over the years, and now approximately 40 boys voluntarily go to the teacher's classroom to meet every week during their lunch period.

Programs to assist students with handling bullying situations and promote positive behavior are important for both the victim and the bully. In addition to assisting the victims in a bullying situation, two participants mentioned the importance of having empathy for the bully as well. Cadence stated, "There's generally a reason why a kid is going to bully someone else, and when they leave here (school) we don't really know what is happening at home." Sometimes these kids have behavioral issues in the classroom and on the playground, do not participate in class and have academic difficulties, or are dealing with matters the school is unaware of, causing problems. There are often so few of these kids, that it seems more attention is needed to help those students overcome the behaviors of a bully. Ophelia mentioned that bullies and victims both need a support system and feel that if students do not have it at home, and they are not getting it at school, then more issues could arise. She further stressed the need for programs to focus on all students to help change the behavior of the bullies, while empowering the victims.

One strategy used to help the bullies in the school was to remove their audience by changing an elective period and placing the bully in a kindergarten class to assist the teacher and students. Ophelia supported the effectiveness of this strategy because it helped to put the bully in a place where they could experience the feeling of helping others, rather than hurting them. Willow mentioned the importance of teaching empathy

and does this by giving the bully the opportunity to hear how the victim feels. Teaching both parties how to communicate is essential, and this type of meeting helps the victim become empowered by preparing a script to address the bully and demonstrates to the bully the emotions and feelings involved in their actions.

Both administrators felt that regardless of the program used, the instruction and discussion on bullying needs to be incorporated into the daily lessons with students. The assemblies and curriculum programs are an option, but overall "it has to be a day to day conversation" with character education, said Ophelia. All teacher participants felt that a character program may be helpful, but those that are scripted and do not focus on the daily discussions are not effective. Bart, an eighth-grade teacher, felt that truly listening to students could be more helpful than the programs that are giving teachers step-by-step instructions during a character education lesson.

Both administrators and six of the eight teachers mentioned building a relationship with students as an important component in addressing bullying situations. Ophelia felt strongly that if the adults at the school made a connection with the students, the students were more respectful. She further explained that the adult is there to care, guide, and teach students by exhibiting behaviors that reflect a positive role model. Willow demonstrated this by explaining the importance of having a rapport with students and setting up a system to divert negative behaviors when they feel like they are going to make a poor choice. For example, if a student is having a difficult morning, Willow tells the student to go to the office prior to going to class so they can talk through the situation, in an attempt to avoid any negative behaviors. This relationship also conveyed a feeling

of accountability for students, because they didn't want to disappoint the administrators that spent time talking to them, and demonstrated they have a sincere concern for their own well-being.

The administrators also believed that students at their school genuinely feel comfortable with their teachers and often report instances of bullying or other inappropriate behavior. Six of eight teacher participants expressed the importance of building relationships with the students to create a comfort level that allows them to feel safe when reporting a bullying incident. Garnet tries to interact with her students as much as possible. She does not want them to feel like she is only there when needed, so she celebrates their accomplishments as well. Garnet wants students to know she is always available if there is an issue, and would help them in any way possible. She also felt it was important to foster student relationships by teaching them how to form trusted bonds with one another. Incorporating activities into the curriculum and practicing effective communication skills with the students were two ways she discussed that helped to build these connections in the classroom.

Bailey conveyed the need for students to feel like they have an adult to confide in when situations arise. Part of this trust building includes letting students know she is a safe outlet if they need to come forward with bullying information. She found that students would not admit to knowledge of a situation if they thought their name was mentioned in any way, fearing the problem would get worse. Bailey emphasized the amount of time and effort it takes to build this connection and trust with students, but felt it plays a crucial role in the amount of bullying and behavior issues in her classroom.

Daisy mentioned her effectiveness when dealing with bullying situations relied upon her personal connection with students. She felt that building a rapport with her students inside and outside of the classroom, and getting to know them beyond the academics made a larger effect on her ability to handle behavior-related issues, especially when it came to students trusting her with information related to bullying. Her efforts included talking to students about such areas as family, interests outside of school, and challenging issues with friends, and reassuring them she was a safe place for their discussion. Daisy stated, "If students talk to me about their personal lives when there are no problems, they'll feel more comfortable talking about difficult issues that might come up throughout the year."

Caitlyn felt she does not have the time for much personal discussion due to the content area she teaches but tries to incorporate getting to know her students during the time she has each period. She begins each class period by standing at the door of her classroom to smile and greet every student and feels this helps students feel special and welcomed. Caitlyn also attempts to build relationships with her students by stopping at their desk while they are working on a task individually, to hear about what is happening with them outside of the classroom. During this short amount of time she has to get to know her students, she feels she is able to build trust, let them know they are safe, and that their thoughts are always respected. Caitlyn also felt strongly that this bond with students could help students feel more comfortable telling her when a bullying or other negative behavior issue arose.

Ella wanted to form relationships with her students to help them feel more

comfortable coming to her with a bullying situation. She mentioned that this bond with all of her students could also assist those who are participating in the bullying actions and encourage them to be forthcoming with information and more open to strategies to help overcome this behavior. Ella also found it helpful that some of her students developed a connection with other junior high teachers so that provided more options for them to have an adult to confide in with sensitive information regarding bullying situations.

Bart said the first thing he does when he begins a new school year is start making bonds with students by learning all about them, creating trust, and letting them know that he is there to support them. He mentioned that students will "form a strong bond with you if they know you will show up and make them feel wanted, needed, and respected." In addition, he felt that the teachers he works with at the middle school level spend time getting to know all of the students, which helps provide a safe and comfortable environment for them to come forth in a difficult situation, such as bullying.

The finding related to teacher and student relationships and the connection to bullying prevention and positive school climate is consistent with the research in this area. O'Brennan, Waasdorp, and Bradshaw (2014) collected data from a sample of 5,064 teachers and school staff members to examine levels of staff connectedness and the relation to bullying intervention. The researchers established that staff that had a sense of affiliation and commitment to the overall school and the students may have a positive influence on the probability of intervening in bullying situations.

When teachers build a relationship with their students, it shows a loyalty to their school and a higher level of professional commitment. The schools with a low level of

connectedness had more reported occurrences of physical, verbal, and relational bullying. In turn, the schools with higher levels of teacher and student connectedness had a lower rate of bullying incidences. The personal connection with students also affects the staff members' willingness to intervene in difficult situations, as well as the likelihood of discussing complex issues. In addition, staff members that know their students well will more often take a direct approach when addressing sensitive topics that have historically been difficult to discuss. They concluded that the relationship students had with the staff members at a school positively affected the level of comfort in teachers intervening in bullying situations.

Positive school relationships also affected the student level of reporting victimization in a study by Low and Ryzin (2014). The researchers found a connection between supportive school communities and a higher usage of coping skills, one of which is seeking help from an adult at the school because the feeling of safety is greater. The skills learned by the students in their interactions with the teachers provide a supportive, trusting model for them to follow in other relationships.

A supportive school climate can be helpful in developing and maintaining positive student and teacher relationships. Wang, Berry, and Swearer (2013) evaluated the school climate through the use of an inventory given to students, parents, and staff members to assess perceptions of safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, and school environment. The researchers discovered that in addition to incorporating intervention programs into the daily curriculum, it is necessary to involve the whole school community in the anti-bullying efforts. They further emphasized the

importance of building positive relationships at the school in an effort to improve school climate and reduce bullying incidences through the use of a violence prevention program.

Research Question 2

The second research question for this study was: How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators describe the PLC processes they use to address the critical issue of bullying**?** All participants were asked about the processes they use to address bullying situations at the school. Subjects addressed the level of collaboration with the administrators, teachers, parents, and the school district. Findings emerged from the interviews that addressed each area and the overall collaborative culture of the school. In addition, participants discussed professional development in relation to bullying and the current programs being used at the school.

There are varying views on the amount and type of collaboration taking place to address bullying issues. The two administrator participants discussed the amount of collaboration in a positive manner, sharing examples of how they work with the teachers to address bullying incidences. Ophelia mentioned her strategy of going to the teachers first when students come to the office with a bullying issue. She saw the role of an administrator as pivotal in communicating with the teachers, and felt the teachers have a more open relationship with the students, so help is sought to find more details and information about the situation. Ophelia described the middle school teachers as "very pro kid. They really do have connections with them, and they've been great as far as the support for that approach." She also mentioned the administrators make every effort to communicate with the teachers after interviewing students involved in a bullying

incident. Ophelia thinks it is important to let them know what they are working on and what to watch for in a particular situation, however, this can sometimes be difficult due to time constraints.

Ophelia also explained the data team meetings, or collaboration days, that take place one time per trimester. The meetings are 3 hours in length, include both administrators, the teachers in a given grade level, and the intervention specialist, and bring forth issues directly related to the curriculum and students in their grade. She described these meetings as a time to discuss scores and intervention, as well as students that are in need of behavior assistance. Although the discussion could include a bullying situation, there is a limited amount of time during these meetings, so she mentioned they might need to meet outside of this data team time to accomplish that goal.

The additional meetings Ophelia mentioned often come in the form of a middle school teacher meeting at lunch, in which they often invite one or both of the administrators to attend. She explained that she would like to join these informal meetings, however, it can be difficult to do during the lunch hour when she is in the cafeteria or on the playground with students. Ophelia stressed the importance of the impromptu meetings because they allow teachers an opportunity to debrief on current bullying and behavior issues, and devise strategies to handle situations.

With regard to collaboration with parents, Ophelia felt this was a strong component in her ability to deal with bullying, in that she always called parents to let them know what happened with their child at school. She emphasized the importance of parents as willing participants in the process of helping students through a bullying

situation. Ophelia mentioned that parents might not always know their child is being bullied; so collaborating with them can assist with the student learning and practicing new strategies both at home and at school.

Willow said there are various ways administrators work with teachers to help prevent or deal with situations as they arise. She mentioned the use of the school-wide Second Step program as a large part of how they collaborate to deal with bullying situations. Willow further explained the program as a way for all teachers to have a common language when discussing situations with the administrators, other teachers, and the students. In addition to Second Step, the PAWS committee, comprised of administrators, teachers, and the intervention specialist, works to develop programs to promote a positive school culture. Willow shared the importance of her informal conversations with the teachers that are always taking place, and the idea that "we're around, we're visible, and we pop into classrooms to see how students are doing. The more we check in on them, the better."

Willow also discussed the significance of the teacher's role in dealing with bullying situations and explained the strategy of asking teachers to tell students to fill out a report form in the office to make the administrators aware of the situation. The bullying report form is anonymous and asks students to explain a situation in writing, in an attempt to clarify if the student is a victim or a bystander, so an administrator can further investigate. Willow also said she encourages the middle school teachers to "be proactive and notify the other teachers in the junior high to keep the students on their radar to make sure they are doing well."

Willow considered parent collaboration a key element in supporting students during a bullying situation. She also concentrated on the teacher's obligation to contact parents when their child is involved in an incident. She emphasized "Parents are often not aware of the bullying because the child hasn't had the conversation with them." Willow felt that parents should be brought to the office to have a face-to-face conversation so the school can stress the importance of being aware of the child's well-being, and the steps they are taking to ensure the safety of the student.

All eight teacher participants, on the other hand, presented a different perspective on the amount of collaboration taking place at the school. Garnet recalled a situation when one of her students was involved in a bullying incident on the playground and was later called into the office. She believed it was important to know what happened and why the students were talking with an administrator. Garnet felt that "communication is key to knowing what is going on with your students. I feel like I can help them if I know." She went to talk to the administrators to get the details but felt it would be much more productive if the teachers are notified so they can work together as a team.

Garnet accentuated the open communication among the teachers and felt it was an instrumental piece in them working together to help students solve a problem. The use of phone calls and emails about bullying or other behavior situations facilitated a conversation that generally took place in the lunchroom. The teachers discussed the situations and how best to proceed with a solution and possible consequences. She further commented, "Everyone is very cooperative and willing to help kids, so talking about the incident and coming to a resolution together works really well."

Moreover, Garnet remembered a recent bullying issue that involved two of her female students. She worked with other teachers to resolve the situation and after a short period of time when it was not resolved, she brought it to the attention of the administrators. After working with administrators and calling the parents, the student began to make changes and the bullying stopped. Garnet concluded, "We need help from the parents and administrators, and it lets students know we are a team, working together to keep them safe."

Abel believed the initial reporting of a bullying incident was generally the only discussion that took place with administrators. The administrator sends an email to let the teacher know a situation is in the process of being resolved, and whether or not the students need to be separated in class. Abel described the process as more of a "closed book" and wished the conversation included more details about what was happening and how it was handled.

Abel also focused on the grade level teacher and administrator collaboration meetings that took place every trimester. He felt they were helpful in coordinating the curriculum and discussing where they were headed as a grade level, and most often concentrated on state test scores, academic intervention, district assessments, lesson plans, and upcoming school events. He stated, "It's always a big complaint about not having enough time. The meeting time was limited to 3 hours and so many new things are always being piled on, that we never had the chance to talk about the students and current behavior situations."

The teacher collaboration Abel described was a more informal process and often

took place in a casual setting during lunchtime. The fifth- through eighth-grade teachers have an overlapping lunchtime and much of the discussion regarding students and behavior situations occurs during this period. He mentioned his grade level used to have a weekly planning meeting, which allowed them to talk to one another about specific situations, but this year the meetings were inconsistent, leaving lunchtime as the only designated discussion period. Abel expressed his appreciation of this time spent with his colleagues and found it helpful in resolving student issues. If students were having difficulties with other students, the other teachers were apprised of the situation and could keep a closer watch on them.

Daisy offered her insights about the collaboration at the school site, saying that the teachers are not often involved in a bullying situation once it is referred to the office. She continued to clarify that when the administrators are notified, there is little follow through or feedback to the teachers unless a seating or other classroom change needs to occur. The teachers do not receive a report on the severity of a situation, and felt it would be helpful to receive a notification about the students involved in a bullying incident, and the steps taken to rectify a situation. She emphasized that there is, "a disconnect in the process."

Daisy also mentioned the collaboration meetings that take place once per trimester to discuss curriculum and testing data but considered the informal lunch meetings with her colleagues much more effective at dialoging about students and issues related to bullying and behavior. The lunch hour provided a time to collaborate about kids that need behavioral and academic assistance. In addition, she highlighted the email

system as a method to communicate with her colleagues prior to or after the lunch discussions, if there was a behavior or bullying situation that needed to be observed in other classes.

Caitlyn concentrated on a deficiency in the collaborative process with the administrators for dealing with bullying situations. The administrators had not addressed bullying this year, and she was unaware of any processes to follow when a situation arises. She said students receive consequences, such as detentions, referrals, and suspensions for their bullying actions, but the information was not relayed to the teacher. "It's not a teacher and office collaborative discussion, and I think it needs to be," Caitlyn stated. She also considered the grade level data team meetings with the administrators a necessary aspect of collaboration but did not perceive this to be enough time to address any individual student behavior issues. The agenda items at these meetings often focused on test scores, benchmarks, schedules, and events, but she further emphasized the "need for more time together with administrators to talk more about the students."

Caitlyn also discussed lunchtime as a primary time to collaborate with her seventh- and eighth-grade colleagues. Due to her content area, she taught all seventh- and eighth-grade students, so this period allowed her to talk to the other junior high teachers about students and behavior or bullying issues. She found the ideas from the other teachers helped her to resolve behavior issues because they may have a different perspective or more information and share it with the group during this time. They work together to come up with resolutions, which allows for more consistency in how situations are handled. In addition, she mentioned the time walking back and forth from

the classroom, or stopping by other teachers' classrooms to discuss a situation was helpful as well. She wants to be able to learn as much as she can about her students, and lunchtime or the impromptu short discussions do not provide adequate time for this to happen.

Ella established the importance of communicating and collaborating with the administrators when a bullying situation arises. She wanted to let them know when an issue occurs so it is documented, in case there is a need for further action. However, Ella further stated that teachers don't often hear anything once the issue is referred, and "it cripples us as teachers. It is helpful to have more information, to know how a situation has been dealt with, so we can be more proactive in the classroom." She added it would be helpful to have a collaborative process to deal with bullying situations, whereby teachers would be involved in the disciplinary action. Ella stressed the investment and connection she has with her students and felt at odds with not knowing what is happening with them during the discipline process. "I think it would be beneficial to see everyone as a team, where it's not just us and them. We are all in it together."

Further, Ella found the time with her colleagues at lunch to be a valuable resource in determining an action plan for students. If she had a bullying situation in her classroom, she emailed the other grade level teachers to let them know who was involved and what happened, and then followed up with a discussion with the teachers during lunch. The teachers discovered that if a bullying incident occurred in one classroom, it would often be present in another.

In addition, three of the 8 teachers that emphasized the need for more

collaboration brought up other related issues. Bart believed the lack of collaboration was due in part to the Second Step program. He expressed his opinion that the administrators treated the school-wide violence prevention program as the answer to all of the issues related to bullying, and he disagreed with saying "it kills our collaboration." Bart was involved in the collaboration meetings for the last 3 years and realized the importance of teachers working together to discuss behavior or academic situations to discover issues that needed to be addressed, "but there is never enough time to cover everything." He also mentioned there is a new administrator at the school site and believed that played a role in the lack of collaboration as a team this year.

Bart also appreciated the lunch schedule, which provided time with his seventh- and eighth-grade colleagues to talk freely about current circumstances with students. He felt it was important to make everyone aware of a situation, and in turn, showed the students they are consistently working together as a team. Bart addressed the need for more time to collaborate with his colleagues but felt like it was, "a step in the right direction," because all teachers are in the same place at the same time.

When asked about the collaboration with parents, Bart believed the parents should be involved in all bullying situations with students. He felt a meeting with the parents, teachers, administrators, and students can be helpful in resolving an issue. Bart described the administrator and teacher's ability to effectively handle a situation as, "ineffective unless we have the parents on board."

Bailey also discussed the importance of new administrators collaborating with teachers about bullying incidents. She recalled that the administrators did not address

bullying in terms of the whole staff and what to do, and felt it would be helpful for them to do so. Bailey stated that her informal conversations at lunchtime played a role in her ability to deal with bullying and other behavior situations because the teachers gave her ideas on how to handle the issue. She felt open communication with parents is also important as she recalled a situation when the parent brought a bullying issue to her attention. Bailey considered a collaborative culture with the administrators, teachers, and parents to be a necessity and wanted more of that type of environment within the school.

Cadence felt the same way about the need for more knowledge regarding the processes for handling bullying situations. She was aware of what to do in the past, "but with a new administrator, I'm unsure of what to do if something happens, and I have been asking." Cadence described the time she spends with her colleagues as a, "fly by conversation," but established that this was time well spent in dealing with bullying. She said she explains to her colleagues what bullying or behavioral situations are occurring with her students, and oftentimes, found that other teachers have dealt with the same issue, and even with the same group of students.

In addition to the varying views on collaboration, eight of 10 participants felt there was an inadequate amount of professional development in the area of bullying prevention and intervention. One administrator and seven teacher participants discussed the amount of professional development in the area of bullying. Ophelia mentioned a county training she attended approximately 4 years ago that focused on positive behavior intervention and support. A small group of teachers and administrators from the district attended the training and later developed the PAWS committee to define bullying,

establish a set of school-wide rules, and develop incentive programs to promote positive behavior. She considered the training and committee invaluable but expressed the need to update and train additional teachers more often.

As a former district office administrator, the principal also attended a bullying training that focused on the supervision component that considered the layout of the campus and placement of campus safety aides. She emphasized the importance of this professional development as having a "big impact on bullying, and even on how we communicate with the parents." With regard to training on the current Second Step program, Ophelia stated formal professional development had not been revisited at least in the last year since her stint as the principal began, and she would like to see more support and focus on that area for the next school year.

Cadence emphasized the school has been using the Second Step program for many years and the teachers received an initial training to look through the materials, but there is "no follow up training, or here is how to make it better" and she believed that is what is missing. She explained the program needs a follow through, as it is not effectively addressing bullying and teaching skills on how to handle bullying situations to students, which is what the intermediate grade levels would like it to do, and ongoing training to discuss new implementation ideas would be helpful.

Cadence also mentioned a district professional development workshop focused on bullying in the format of a presentation with staff, teachers, and students. She couldn't remember how long ago because it was not recent, but described the demonstration from an outside source as giving packets of information on how to deal with bullying. The

professional development leader went through the packets with staff, but she did not recall any role-playing or what specifically the training covered because "it was a long time ago."

Garnet recalled a teacher in-service day on the Second Step program when it first began about 8 years ago but said she has not received any further professional development with the program specifically. However, she mentioned a minimum day training the teachers received a few years ago that addressed bullying and "what it is, what it isn't, what it looks like." Garnet believed additional training on strategies to handle bullying situations would be helpful.

When Abel arrived at the school eight years ago, he taught third grade and received a perfunctory training as an introduction to Second Step. He described it as "not much of a training," but more as a way to "explore, feel it out, see what it looks like, how are you going to implement it", with no further follow up. When he moved to sixth grade two years ago, he did not receive professional development on the middle school Second Step program. Abel would like to see more intensive training on prevention and intervention, as well as "real life application" when dealing with bullying issues. He finds the meeting time at lunch with his colleagues has helped him to learn new strategies, and he would like to expand on that in relation to current and relevant bullying and behavior issues at the school site.

Bailey was one of the original trainers for the Second Step program when it was adopted in the school district "about eight or nine years ago." The program was launched with a brief introductory training at the beginning of a school year to show the

components to the teachers but did not focus on how to implement it into the classroom. Bailey said, “Since that time, there has been absolutely no training or professional development with it at all.”

Caitlyn has been teaching junior high for two years and received no professional development on bullying or the Second Step program. She mentioned she does not deal with bullying often and when a situation did arise, she used her colleagues’ expertise to help her with an effective resolution. Caitlyn would like to broaden her knowledge base in this area because she felt if bullying situations arise in the future, or if she were to go to another school where discipline was more prevalent, she would not be prepared.

Daisy recalled the brief introductory training when the Second Step program was adopted. She believed the amount of use and depth of knowledge regarding the curriculum plays a role into how often the program is used and how far a teacher has delved into the materials. Daisy stated the teachers “have not been given any district guidelines on how to implement” the program and therefore, “everyone has their own take on it.” She considered the school in a transition with the Second Step program, but took part in a 2-hour professional development presentation 3 years ago that gave information on bullying statistics, how to deal with situations, current policies on reporting forms, and also Child Protective Services. Daisy stressed the limited number of training days, and felt “the administrators had done their job, for them to throw something in pertaining to it.”

Ella moved to the junior high two years ago from the intermediate level and did not receive the initial training provided when the Second Step program began. She

described it as “here it is, here is your binder, implement it.” Although Bart attended the introductory training on the Second Step program many years ago, he emphasized the need for professional development on bullying strategies that recognize the individuality of the students. He does not feel a program “created by the state of California is going to help everybody” and accentuated that training should focus on a more personal level, where every situation is viewed with a different lens, and teachers learn how to treat them as such.

Relationship of Findings to the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is a PLC as a culture of trust and a culture of change where teachers can feel supported by the administrators and their colleagues, and feel free to participate in professional development opportunities. Creating a culture of trust and change at a school can be a difficult task for teachers and administrators, and the collaborative nature of a PLC can be helpful.

Hord (1997) defined the term professional learning communities to include a group of professionals with expertise in a specific field. The experts in this case study are the teachers and administrators at the school site. The learning in a PLC occurs when the members of the PLC are gaining skills and knowledge by practicing teaching and leading continuously. DuFour (2008) found the greatest method for improving student learning is to empower the teachers and invest in their learning in an ongoing manner. The community in a PLC stems from a group of experts interrelated with a core of common interests. The dimensions of a PLC including shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, and

supportive conditions, can provide a framework for the administrators and teachers to assist them with developing a culture of trust and a culture of change in the school environment. Shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, and supportive conditions relate to the findings in this study.

Shared and supportive leadership. Hord (2007) considered shared and supportive leadership in a PLC as a notion that administrators and teachers view themselves as being on the same level. In this type of environment, the administrators work with the teachers to examine critical issues and make decisions together. In this case study, both administrators mentioned their open line of communication with the teachers is key to handling bullying situations. On the other hand, 7 of 8 teacher participants felt they were not included in the decision making process once a bullying situation was sent to the administrators. For example, Abel mentioned receiving emails from administrators regarding whether or not a situation had been resolved, however, he emphasized that the communication was not an invitation for assistance with a resolution. Caitlyn recalled hearing from her students that they had received consequences, such as detentions or suspensions, after a bullying situation was resolved in the office, but was not informed by the administrators. Ella, Garnet, and Bailey all felt it would be helpful for teachers to be involved in the process of disciplinary action with a bullying situation to encourage working together as a team. In addition, Crowther (2009) believed shared leadership of teachers and administrators within the processes of a PLC encourages student improvement.

Collective learning and application. A culture of trust and a culture of change

can occur when teachers and administrators collaborate to discuss and handle bullying situations. According to DuFour (2008), the members of a PLC collaborate to,

> create an environment that fosters shared understanding, a sense of identity, high levels of involvement, mutual cooperation, collective responsibility, emotional support, and a strong sense of belonging as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone (p. 20)

The collaboration time that took place at the school site was spent on discussing data, academic intervention, and the curricular scope for each grade level. The focus was generally on academics, and little time was spent dealing with behavior issues such as bullying. The two administrator participants felt there was an adequate amount of collaboration taking place with regard to bullying issues while all 8 teacher participants at the school site felt there was a need for further collaborating in this area.

DuFour (2008) stated that in a PLC, collaboration is a process that allows teachers the opportunity to work together to improve professional practice. Although each participant mentioned the collaboration, or data team meetings, that occurred three times per year, for the grade levels to meet with the administrators to discuss test scores and other intervention data, they did not have time to talk about bullying or behavior issues during this designated three hour meeting. The collaboration during these meetings focused on academic scores and intervention, not on behavior issues such as bullying. Each of the teacher participants mentioned there was a need to increase the amount and type of collaboration on bullying issues between administrators and teachers at the school site. More time needs to be scheduled specifically for teachers to discuss current student

behavior, safety, and bullying issues with administrators.

The teacher participants also discussed the informal collaboration that took place during their lunch hour to assist with handling bullying situations. Although they found this to be an invaluable resource with one another to relay information or seek strategies to handle a bullying issue, the teachers had to find their own time and opportunities for discussion, making lunch a time when they asked for help from one other. The teacher participants wanted support from the administrators in these discussions, in the form of additional time during designated meetings with them to discuss bullying and behavior issues.

Teachers and administrators need to be able to construct a collaborative culture to work together, and a specific time to discuss bullying and behavior issues can contribute to this type of environment. DuFour (2008) described the time in a PLC as not just time to learn a new strategy, but also to focus on the goal of helping teachers create conditions for learning. Bullying can be a barrier to student learning, and a PLC can help to provide the environment necessary for teachers to collaborate on this critical issue.

Collaboration should also include collective inquiry, which conducts an ongoing assessment of curriculum and programs to determine best practices. The Second Step program has been used for approximately 9 years in the district to address bullying prevention and intervention, as well as other negative behaviors. According to all 10 participants, assessment of the effectiveness of this program has not taken place, and professional development has not occurred since the initial training to discuss the components of the program.

Supportive conditions. Supportive conditions contain a relationship and structural component of a PLC that includes an environment designed to encourage teachers and administrators to collaborate. Hord (1997) described the structural segment of supportive conditions as the when, where, and how teachers and administrators come together to learn, share, and address critical issues. The administrators at the school site provided a designated time for them to meet with teachers for three hours, one time per trimester, however, these meetings were designed to discuss academic-related issues such as test scores and intervention and not critical issues such as bullying.

The relationship portion of supportive conditions is comprised of teachers showcasing strategies to their colleagues and receiving feedback. The purpose of this type of interaction to address school issues such as bullying is to discuss and reflect on observations and allow for questioning and critiquing the strategies used in the classroom. This type of environment fosters a climate of trust that can lead to a climate of change, and provide students with a safe and supportive place to learn, without bullying and behavior issues. The teachers at the school site have not been provided with an opportunity to observe their colleagues using strategies to handle bullying situations.

Tenets of a PLC not Addressed in the Findings

Shared values and vision and shared personal practice were not addressed in the findings of this study. Shared values and vision should include administrators and teachers working together to create a vision statement and deciding what must be done to accomplish this vision. The idea is that when a group creates a vision together, there is a greater sense of ownership and commitment to the goal. In this study, the administrators

at the school site, along with several of the teacher participants are new and were not a part of the school's vision statement created several years ago.

Shared personal practice in a PLC supports teacher observation of one another to enrich student learning. The idea is for teachers to have the opportunity to see another teacher utilizing best practices in instructional methods, and in this case, those focused on strategies to handle bullying situations. After the teachers complete the observation, they provide feedback to one another, promoting a culture of trust and enhancing supportive conditions. At this time, the teacher participants at this school site have not participated in shared personal practice.

Discrepant Cases

There were three areas of discrepancy found within the data. The first discrepancy originated when Caitlyn mentioned she was a math teacher and felt the reason she found it difficult to build relationships with her students was due to the content area she teaches. She said that the English, science, and self-contained classrooms could incorporate much more discussion into a lesson than she is allowed in math instruction, and this affected the amount of time she has to foster relationships. I believe this happened due to the limited amount of time Caitlyn has with her students and teaching all seventh- and eighth-grade math, which makes it difficult to incorporate any other curricular components into her instruction.

A second discrepancy occurred when Cadence mentioned the use of the Tribes program as a strategy for dealing with bullying situations. She found the Second Step program as ineffective and said her prior training in a different program seemed to be

more successful. Cadence was the only participant to incorporate Tribes strategies into her bullying intervention. In my opinion, the concept of Tribes was mentioned by Cadence because she was the only participant to receive this training at the district many years ago.

A third discrepancy was found in the use of the meeting strategy with students when a bullying situation arises. Both administrators and 7 of 8 teacher participants found this strategy to be their first level of bullying intervention. Abel was the only participant to not mention this as a strategy he used to address bullying incidences. Instead, he focused on the use of the Second Step program and the informal meetings with his colleagues at lunch to help him resolve bullying situations. I believe Abel used the program and relied on other teachers in the junior high because he came from an elementary background and these two strategies helped him to deal with bullying at a different level.

Evidence of Quality

Member Checking

The strategy of member checking was used in this case study to ensure accuracy and allow the participants the opportunity to analyze the data derived from the interview transcriptions. Hatch (2002) stated the process of member checking allows for all participants to provide feedback on the interview transcriptions and researcher interpretations. In this case study, I emailed the completed transcriptions to the individual participants via a personal email address, and invited them to clarify or add additional information, and offer feedback on my interpretations. Other than two minor

clarifications due to an unclear portion on the digital recorder, all 10 participants approved the initial interview transcriptions.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a process in which a variety of data sources is used to cross check the data. Yin (2009) emphasized the importance of using varied sources in a case study to corroborate the findings. In this case study, I examined the interview transcriptions and various public school district documents, such as the district policy and forms on bullying, the CHKS, and the parent information handbook.

The district policy on bullying prevention emphasized that bullying is taken very seriously and students who participate in this type of behavior will receive consequences for their behavior. Although the specific consequences were not discussed in the interview transcripts, the administrators and the teachers expressed the gravity of bullying situations and the need for them to be addressed. In addition, the bullying report form mentioned by one of the administrators and one of the teachers is available on the district website and in the school offices.

The parent information handbook is given to all students at the beginning of the year and is also available on the school website. The information presented in here is not specific to bullying prevention, but addresses student conduct and discipline procedures. Bullying is mentioned as a behavior that is not allowed at the school.

I was unable to examine a professional development schedule because the district did not have a document with this specific information about what type of teacher training is provided, however; I viewed the academic calendar posted on the website and

found the district provides two optional teacher buyback days for professional development, but the topics or agendas were not listed on the calendar. This data matched the interview transcripts regarding the amount of professional development currently occurring in the district.

Member checking and triangulation allowed me to maintain evidence of quality in this study. Yin (2009) found the use of several sources enhanced the credibility of a case study. In this case study, a variety of perspectives on bullying was attained by interviewing a principal and vice-principal, and eight teachers across four different grade levels, and all content areas including self-contained and content-specific classrooms.

Summary

In this section, I presented the findings from the qualitative analysis of the interview and document data. The data revealed themes regarding how administrators and teachers handled bullying situations and how they used the processes of a PLC to address these issues. The themes included strategies and interventions for handling bullying situations, bullying prevention programs, school climate, and collaboration with other teachers, teacher collaboration with administrators, and professional development related to bullying and bullying programs.

Overall, the data revealed the most common strategy to deal with bullying situations included addressing the issues in a meeting with the victim and bully present. In addition, the school adopted a bullying prevention and intervention program called Second Step, however, there are varying viewpoints as to the consistency and use of this program. Participants also mentioned other programs currently being used within the

school. Further, several participants cited the importance of building a relationship with students as being a component to preventing bullying situations and a positive school climate.

The data also revealed diverse perspectives on the amount and type of collaborating taking place at the school site. The findings concluded that teachers expressed a need for additional support in the form of a designated meeting time to discuss bullying and other behavior situations. Currently, the amount of collaboration time and how it is used is dictated to them; consequently, they rely on informal settings during lunchtime to discuss critical issues such as bullying. In addition, the findings showed an inadequate amount of professional development in the area of bullying prevention and intervention.

The findings in this study were related to the broader literature in the area of bullying prevention and intervention and the conceptual framework of professional learning communities. I used member checking and triangulations to ensure the quality of the data. In Section 5, I will discuss the interpretation of the findings, the implications for social change, recommendations for action and further study, and a reflection on my experience with the research process.

Section 5: Conclusions

Students in fifth and seventh grade in a local suburban K–8 school expressed in the CHKS that they were feeling unsafe, inciting the need for this investigation into the bullying occurring at the school site. Given the problem, the purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore strategies used by teachers and administrators to deal with bullying situations, and the professional learning processes used to handle bullying at the school.

The research questions used to guide this inquiry are derived from the problem statement and further explained in the purpose of the study and are listed below:

1. How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators respond to bullying incidents?
2. How do regular education classroom teachers and administrators describe the PLC processes they use to address the critical issue of bullying?

This qualitative case study used semistructured interviews and documents to inquire about the problem at the research site. The interviews were conducted with the principal, vice-principal, and eight teacher participants from the fifth- through eighth-grade. The teacher interviews were conducted for 3 weeks, and the administrator interviews took place after the school year ended. Member checking of the interview transcripts was used to check for accuracy of the researcher's interpretations. I examined public documents, including the district and school policies and forms on bullying and

the code of conduct.

Based on the data collected, several themes emerged regarding how teachers and administrators respond to bullying incidents and the professional learning processes they use to address these issues. The following aspects were discussed in the findings: Strategies and interventions for handling bullying situations, bullying prevention programs, school climate, collaboration with other teachers, teacher collaboration with administrators, and professional development related to bullying and bullying programs.

Interpretation of the Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore and identify the strategies and professional learning processes used by teachers and administrators to handle bullying situations in fifth- through eighth-grade. Based on the data derived from the interviews and documents, and information gathered from the literature, I concluded that the conceptual framework of a PLC was valid for exploring the processes teachers use to handle bullying situations, and there is a need for additional professional development and collaboration for administrators and teachers.

Professional learning community. The PLC was used as a conceptual framework to examine how teachers are using these processes to handle bullying situations. The school site applied the tenets of shared and supportive leadership, collective learning and application, and supportive conditions as part of their processes of a PLC they used to address critical issues such as bullying. The findings suggested that although these tenets were used at the school site, there was a need for additional emphasis in these areas. For example, the collective learning and application tenet was

present through the formal data team meetings that supported teacher and administrator collaboration time, however, there was no time incorporated into these meetings to include discussion of bullying, student safety, and student behavior. The teachers met informally to examine current student behavior situations but found a need for further collaboration time with the administrators to discuss additional strategies.

One aspect of supportive conditions was also present at the school site and included the data team meetings as a part of the structural components needed to collaborate. The administrators provided the meeting time and place to collaborate, however, information on test scores and intervention monopolized the one time per trimester discussion, and did not emphasize student behavior, school safety, and current bullying situations. The relationships component of the supportive conditions was not a factor in the findings of this study, as teachers were not given the opportunity to observe, critique, and question other teachers' strategies for handling bullying situations. This portion can prove invaluable to the school site and allow teachers to learn new strategies from their colleagues.

Shared values and vision and shared personal practice were the two PLC tenets that were not present in the findings. Hord (2007) described shared values and vision as including all staff members to be involved in the process of creating a vision statement for the school. Although the participants did not create the school's vision together, as it was created prior to the new administrator joining the school, all of the teachers and administrators expressed their desire to help students feel safe and succeed.

Shared personal practice is a type of professional learning that gives the

opportunity for peers to observe one other and provide feedback (Hipp et al., 2008). In this study, shared personal practice was not a part of the school site's regular professional development. Using this practice could be another application of the processes of a PLC at the school site. Teachers could observe one another using a strategy to handle a bullying situation and present various perspectives during a PLC meeting.

Teacher and administrator collaboration. The views on the amount and type of collaboration at the school site varied. The administrators considered the data team meetings, which took place one time per trimester, with the teachers of each grade level as an adequate amount of collaboration regarding behavioral situations. All of the teachers mentioned the meetings however, they emphasized that the content included testing and academic intervention information and not a discussion on student behavior. The teacher participants all stressed the need for more time to collaborate with colleagues and administrators regarding critical issues such as bullying.

Teachers at the school site held informal meetings to discuss bullying incidences and student behavior and found this time invaluable. The lunchtime meetings provided a platform to converse about current situations to make all middle school teachers aware of what is happening with their students. The teachers were also able to present various methods for resolving an issue. Although the findings suggest that these meetings are a crucial component to the teachers' ability to deal with behavior situations, they also expressed the need for the administrators to be present during these discussions. The administrators expressed their desire to be included in these conversations, however, were not often involved in the informal meetings due to the lunch schedule and other

responsibilities.

The research in the area of collaboration corroborates certain findings in this study. Kafyulilo (2013) conducted a study on collaboration as an approach to professional development. He examined various forms of collaboration to determine the benefits of teachers working together toward building a school community and enhancing student learning. He found the opportunity for teachers to collaborate allows them to grow professionally through interaction with their colleagues as the primary benefit. The researcher also stressed the need for opportunities to collaborate as a way for teachers to contribute to their knowledge base and advance problem solving skills. Kafyulilo expressed the need for coherence and consistency among the teachers to positively affect student learning and improved behavior. In addition, the collaborative teamwork of teachers can help them share ideas and obtain feedback on behavioral interventions and instructional strategies.

Wang et al. (2013) focused their research on the effect of a positive school climate in relation to bullying prevention and intervention. The researchers found it a necessity for staff, students, and parents to collaborate when it comes to dealing with behavioral situations to improve school climate. This type of discussion about student issues helps to model to students and parents appropriate behavior to work together to come to a resolution. The positive relationships promote a more helpful and constructive school climate among and between students and teachers.

The studies by Kafylilo (2013) and Wang et al. (2013) are consistent with the findings from this study. Teachers at the study school considered the time spent with their

colleagues discussing behavior issues was pivotal in dealing with bullying. The lunch hour was the most often mentioned time to have a conversation about bullying and behavior, and teachers stressed the importance of this time to share ideas about how to deal with incidences, or to make others aware of specific situations. The data teams, or collaborative meetings, once per trimester were presented by the teachers as a means for focusing on the academic needs of each grade level.

Professional development. In this study, the findings indicated that one administrator and 7 teacher participants considered the amount of professional development at the school site to be insufficient. The school district adopted Second Step, a bullying prevention and intervention program, approximately 8 years ago and the publisher offered an introductory training to display the components of the curriculum. Since that time, no additional professional development has been provided on the use of this program to new and veteran teachers. New teachers received the curricular materials, but were not instructed on how to use them, and veteran teachers, including those that changed grade levels and ultimately the program materials, only received the initial introduction.

Teachers expressed the need for additional training and follow up discussion for the Second Step program. Kafyulilo (2013) argued that without post-workshop training, on a prevention and intervention program, the materials were ineffective and Morgan (2012) found that teachers who have extensive training in the area of bullying situations are more likely to intervene when issues arise.

Because the program was created several years ago and the needs of the school

have changed, the teacher participants would like the opportunity to fully understand all of the components learn new strategies on how to incorporate this material into existing content area curriculum. Kafyulilo (2013) expressed the need for a depth of knowledge regarding bullying prevention and intervention programs as crucial for successfully implementing them in a school. Although the materials are provided at the school site, 8 of 10 participants emphasized that their level of knowledge regarding the use of the curriculum is limited and there is a need for further professional development and follow up for full implementation to occur.

School-wide bullying prevention program studies have produced varying results. Low and Rzyin conducted a study to examine the effects of a stand-alone bullying prevention curriculum and the results revealed that single level programs designed to prevent bullying exhibited limited to no significant results (2014). Pearce, Cross, Monks, Waters, and Falconer (2011) reviewed the guidelines for school bullying prevention in meta-analyses designed to validate intervention programs. The researchers found single school-based bullying programs to be ineffective due to the complexity of bullying and suggested a multidisciplinary approach to prevent and manage bullying behavior.

The Second Step program is considered a single level violence prevention program for students in K–8, designed to promote knowledge and skills in bullying awareness and prevention and foster empathy. Effectiveness reviews completed by Schick and Cierpka (2013) on the Second Step program in the middle schools looked at the most recent studies done by Orpinas et al. (2000) and concluded that male students showed less aggressive behavior than their counterparts, and the students in the

intervention groups gained a greater level of knowledge about violence prevention when the program was used consistently. The study also mentioned the higher levels of effectiveness came from classrooms in which the teachers had a positive attitude toward the Second Step program.

A review of another study conducted by Orpinas et al. in middle schools revealed no effects were discovered, and results were related to the inconsistent use of the program in the school system. Schick and Cierpka (2013) also reviewed a study by Sprague et al. (2001) and found the middle school program to be effective in increased competence in social situations, as well as fewer disciplinary referrals. Both of these positive effects were observed while the Second Step program was combined with other prevention efforts. In addition, the students involved in the program had a higher level of violence prevention knowledge, and the amount of empathy towards others improved more than the students not involved with the program. A comparison group was not used in this study, and therefore, the results are limited.

Orpinas et al. (2000) indicated the Second Step program demonstrated clear effects on the level of prevention in fifth-and sixth-grade children. The students participated in a survey and rated peer rejection more positively after receiving instruction in the Second Step program. The students in the sixth grade showed more distinct differences, with marked changes in positive attitudes toward social exclusion, verbal devaluation, and physical aggression. Overall, the students in the Second Step group predicted less social difficulties in their daily lives, as a result of the knowledge they gained with the program.

Neace and Munoz (2012) conducted an outcome evaluation of the Second Step program to examine the effectiveness. They discovered programs that began at an early age showed more success, as the level of consistency increases when they are used from one year to the next, and the opportunity to effectively intervene in a situation decreases as students mature. The study scrutinized the skills and knowledge base in relation to bullying and violence prevention and the Second Step program. Results indicated that students made substantial advancements in the skills required to avoid aggressive behavior, such as bullying.

Additional benefits recognized in the Neace and Munoz (2012) study included an increased level of attendance and a decreased amount of unexcused tardiness. Moreover, no significant changes in suspensions or the number of suspension days were recorded, which suggested that students' behavior did not progressively worsen. The researchers also concluded that bullying and violence prevention programs, such as Second Step, might need to have multiple components and focus on a multi-context intervention effort.

O'Brennan, Waasdorp, and Bradshaw (2014) conducted a study in which the secondary aim was to evaluate the comfort level in bullying intervention with the availability of a prevention program. The researchers found that although a district adopts a curriculum for bullying prevention, it does not have an effect on the level of comfort on the part of the teachers and staff to intervene in bullying situations.

In addition, the literature in the area of professional development in relation to bullying shows the need for ongoing training for schools. Rigby found that teacher training was considerably lacking and discovered professional development should assist

teachers in learning and using effective methods for handling situations (2011). He considered this lack of professional training to be due in part to the belief that teachers can learn how to deal with bullying while on the job. In addition, Rigby and Bauman (2010) conducted a survey to determine teachers' opinions on addressing bullying and concluded teachers differed in what they felt is the best way to handle situations and were unaware of the options that existed for dealing with bullying.

Morgan's (2012) study on the methods teachers can use to control bullying in the schools focused on the importance of professional development as a means for dealing with these situations. The researcher stated that teachers who are properly trained in this area will be more likely to intervene in bullying situations when they arise. The researcher also discussed the need for a prolonged and detailed effort in the area of teacher training to positively affect the bullying taking place on a school campus. Moreover, the staff development that works for one school culture and community may not necessarily work for another, so the need to customize the bullying training is profound.

Kafyulilo (2013) addressed the need for ongoing teacher training in his study on effective professional development. He found the training without post-workshop support were ineffective, as there is a need for continuity to successfully implement and maintain productive programs. The researcher also examined teacher knowledge regarding curricular programs and the necessity for teachers to understand all components of an intervention program to be able to effectively deliver and adjust the materials for students to learn.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for social change from this research study include various aspects of bullying prevention and intervention and professional development. In the local setting, the research is meaningful to the administrators, teachers, students, and parents at the study school. The findings can help to promote the social well-being of students by contributing to the knowledge base and initiating strategies to effectively handle bullying situations through collaboration and professional development.

The findings in this study can help encourage a structured collaboration time with administrators and teachers to assist with building a knowledge base of strategies to handle bullying situations. At the school site, all participants mentioned the strategy of talking with bullies and students when a situation arises and had few other options to use when an issue occurred. Teachers and administrators can use the data to demonstrate the need for collaboration and the ideas that can be addressed through the PLC culture of trust and change. The findings from this study suggest that there are additional strategies to address bullying at the middle school level and these can be expressed through a PLC.

In the larger context, the findings from this study can provide curriculum developers of prevention and intervention programs information on teacher and administrators needs for addressing bullying situations at the middle school level. The developers can use the data to show the strategies that are currently being using to handle critical issues like bullying and enhance the programs to meet additional needs of teachers and administrators. In addition, program developers can use the findings to possibly incorporate adaptations to their existing prevention and intervention programs to

include strategies for specific content area teachers.

Recommendations for Action

Based on the findings in this case study, there are two recommendations for action. The recommendations are based on collaboration and professional development to assist with handling bullying situations at the school site.

Recommendation #1: Provide more collaboration time. The findings of the study reveal that teachers appreciate the collaboration with administrators and other teachers; however, there was not enough designated time to discuss bullying and behavior situations. The collaboration or data team meetings once per trimester were used to discuss test scores, intervention, curriculum, and other grade level specific academic needs, but were not comprised of enough time to review current bullying and behavior incidences related to students.

Because it can be difficult to increase the number of data team meetings due to the cost of substitute teachers to cover each grade level teachers' classrooms for a half day, I recommend keeping the data team meetings as such and scheduling additional meetings with administrators and teachers to discuss bullying and behavior situations. Rather than one time per trimester, the behavior meetings in the form of a PLC can be scheduled for 30 minutes per grade level in fifth- through eighth-grade, on Mondays when the school releases students one and a half hours early. The Monday PLC meetings can take place on a bi-weekly basis and be reserved solely for the discussion of strategies to handle bullying situations, current behavior issues with students, and prevention and intervention program implementation.

The Monday meetings can also assist in fulfilling the need for communication with the administrators, as mentioned by the teacher participants. The teachers expressed the lack of follow through or communication with administrators when a bullying situation is referred to the office. The administrators stressed the importance of communication with the teachers, but time constraints and workload often impeded this process. A designated biweekly meeting can also be focused on teachers getting updates on behavior situations from administrators, as well as the PLC process of discussing strategies to effectively handle bullying situations.

The teacher participants also mentioned they have a shared lunch hour and often use this time to discuss bullying and behavior issues. Although the teachers value the informal discussions about bullying and behavior situations, they would like for the administrators to join these conversations and become involved in the process. The administrators were invited but were unable to attend due to other lunchtime obligations in the cafeteria and on the playground. During the informal teacher meetings at lunch, a list of information can be compiled for discussion with the administrators during the designated Monday meetings, unless an emergency issue arises.

Another aspect of collaboration and the processes of a PLC is the development of a school shared vision statement. The school has a vision statement, however; it was created prior to the administrators' arrival at the site. Developing or refining the current vision statement as a group of teachers and administrators could be a practical application of the finding that encourages collaboration, so all teachers and administrators feel included and want to support a shared vision statement.

Recommendation #2: Provide additional training. Ongoing professional development can have a positive effect on the school climate, encouraging a safe atmosphere and a decreased amount of bullying. Based on the interview information from the teacher participants, there is a need for more training on the Second Step program. The program was adopted approximately 8 years ago and there was an introductory training to display the components, but no professional development has taken place since that time. Therefore, new teachers have received no training on the program, and veteran teachers have not had the opportunity to discuss the program or ideas on how to effectively implement strategies to handle bullying.

The follow up training can take place on a Monday when students are released early. Because this training is not as often as the PLC meetings regarding bullying situations and behavior, one Monday per trimester can be set aside for the Second Step program. Representatives from the company can be invited to do the training at the school in the beginning of the year, and administrators and teachers can facilitate the other two meetings.

Another option for prevention and intervention program training is during the designated buyback days that are pre-selected for professional development when the district academic calendar is published. The length of time is a teacher workday, approximately six hours of training, two times per year. The drawback to utilizing the buyback days is they are optional for teachers; therefore, not all faculty members would be in attendance.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are four examples of future research that could extend the inquiry started in this study. First, compare the effectiveness of the Second Step prevention and intervention program between boys and girls. Second, assess if there is an effect of new administrators on the amount of collaboration with the teachers and the process for addressing bullying situations. Third, survey math teachers to discover a possible connection between the curriculum in their content area and the lack of an opportunity to build relationships with students. Finally, research to determine if professional development on handling bullying situations has a positive effect on the students' feeling of safety.

Recommendation #1: Bullying prevention and gender. An unexpected finding in this study was the difference between boys and girls when utilizing bullying prevention and intervention programs such as Second Step. For example, because the program used worksheets to practice strategies, Bart, an eighth-grade teacher, mentioned Second Step was not useful for boys because they viewed it as an additional assignment and more work, rather than an activity to teach empathy or handle bullying. In addition, Cadence, a fifth-grade teacher, felt that girls, especially those whom already possess empathy skills enjoyed the role playing and other activities with Second Step.

Comparing the effectiveness of the Second Step program in relationship to gender can be useful for administrators, teachers, and program developers. At the school site level, if there is a connection between the usefulness of particular types of activities for boys and girls, administrators and teachers can focus on lessons to help a specific

gender. On a larger scale at the product development level, the concentration can be on designing specific lessons for each gender within the program.

Recommendation #2: Effect of a new administrator on collaboration. Several teacher participants mentioned new administrators and the need for more collaboration when handling bullying situations. Although the administrators said they wanted to communicate with the teachers regarding specific students and incidences that occurred, their time was limited due to the other responsibilities and time constraints. Additional research in this area can help school districts to identify the areas in which new administrators need support, and possibly find more opportunities for them to collaborate and communicate with the teachers on their school site.

Recommendation #3: Curriculum connection between math teachers and building relationships with students. One of the junior high math teacher participants, Caitlyn, mentioned the challenge of building relationships with students due to the content area she teaches. She expressed that the limited time with her students, and the amount and nature of the work that needs to be covered in math, does not lend itself to the discussion in class on additional topics. Caitlyn felt that it might be easier for other content area teachers to incorporate conversation on bullying, empathy, or other important social lessons into their curriculum. For example, in an English class, the students may read a novel that discusses characters in a similar situation as students, so the lesson can be used as a method to convey information on how to handle an issue.

Additional research in this area can benefit administrators and teachers by possibly identifying strategies for all content areas to use to help them connect with their

students. Math teachers can learn new ways of incorporating discussion regarding bullying and other socially related conversations into their existing lessons. More research in this area can also provide insight on how math teachers can work on building relationships with students given the amount of time and type of curriculum being taught.

Recommendation #4: The effect of professional development on handling bullying. This inquiry began because of the results of the CHKS that showed fifth- and seventh-grade students did not feel safe at school. Interview data showed that teacher participants are utilizing one main strategy of talking with students to address bullying situations and a lack of interest and support with the Second Step prevention and intervention program. In addition, there is little to no professional development with the program or bullying intervention strategies.

Additional research on the effects of professional development on both the Second Step program and strategies to handle bullying situations could provide the administrators and teachers at the school site with valuable information regarding school safety. A survey of students following additional training for the school staff could help to determine if the prevention and intervention programs are effective and if students are feeling safe at school.

Reflection

Although I am currently teaching at the community college level, my background is in K–12 education, where I found the topic of bullying to be in need of further study. My original plan was to focus on the students in a K–8 school because as a vice-principal, I often dealt with bullying situations. The results of the CHKS given to fifth-

and seventh-grade students sparked my interest to focus on the middle school level. When I was a vice-principal, I worked with teachers on how to handle bullying situations and discovered that there was a limited amount of training and existing literature in this area.

I have not been an administrator or teacher in the K–12 system for 7 years, so interviewing the participants for this study and reviewing recent literature allowed me to view how teachers are handling bullying situations and the PLC processes they are using from a current and different perspective. It seems as though student needs are changing to include cyberbullying, in addition to the more traditional physical and verbal bullying in the past. Because students are dealing with additional issues in the area of bullying, it is necessary for teachers to enhance their skills in this realm.

The participants in this study provided thoughtfully, candid answers about their experience and strategies for handling bullying situations; their knowledge, training, and professional development needs. All 10 of the participants were passionate about helping students feel safe to learn in a comfortable school environment. The district superintendent, principal, and vice-principal were supportive of this study. They allowed me to visit the school site for interviews, ask questions, and review public documents.

The use of this school site for my case study research was a good choice and I feel it will provide valuable information to the administrators and teachers at this school. Based on the findings of this study, I will incorporate information about strategies for handling bullying situations and collaboration in the professional development course I teach for teachers at the community college. I will offer a 1- to 2-page summary of the

findings to the district superintendent, administrator, and teachers who participated in the study. The results of this study may assist the school administrators with handling bullying situations to keep students safe, future professional development to enhance the current bullying prevention and intervention programs at the school, and foster collaboration with the teachers and administrators.

Concluding Statement

Bullying as it relates to student safety is the problem that generated interest for this investigation. The local setting in a K–8 school in California provided the case for this study because of the results of the CHKS given to fifth- and seventh-grade students which indicated that they felt unsafe at school. Exploring the strategies to address bullying situations and the PLC processes teachers and administrators use at the school for handling these incidents may contribute to the local setting by providing the knowledge needed to incorporate more collaboration and enhance the professional development on bullying prevention and intervention, hence the purpose of this study.

The study used the conceptual framework of the PLC where educators strive to create a culture of trust and change. The study focused on two research questions that examined the strategies teachers and administrators use for handling bullying situations and the PLC processes they use to address critical issues like bullying. A qualitative case study was the research design with 8 fifth- through eighth- grade teachers and the principal and vice-principal from a K–8 school site serving as the case. I used interpretive analysis of the interview transcriptions and examination of public documents to discover the results of this study. The findings may affect positive social change by contributing to

the knowledge base and initiating strategies to effectively handle bullying situations through collaboration and professional development.

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Appendix A: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer:

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: "A Case Study on Teachers' Descriptions of Bullying, and the Professional Learning Community," I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix B: Teacher Interview Questions

1. How long have you been teaching at the middle school level? What grade(s) and content area(s) do you teach? (Background information)

2. How often do you deal with bullying situations? Where do you think most bullying situations occur? (playground, classroom, halls, cafeteria, etc.)

3. What do you feel is the role of a teacher in dealing with bullying incidents?

4. What strategies have you used to handle bullying situations in the classroom?

5. What are the processes for reporting a bullying incident?

6. How do teachers and administrators collaboratively address the critical issue of bullying incidents in the school setting? (professional learning community)

7. Have you noticed a reduction in the number or severity of bullying incidences due to this collaboration?

8. How does your district or school support your efforts in addressing bullying incidents?

9. How has the support affected your ability to handle bullying situations in the classroom?

10. What support do you feel would be beneficial to you as a classroom teacher in order to foster a culture of trust and a culture of change at your school? (professional learning community)

11. In what ways, if any, have bullying incidences affected student learning in the classroom?

12. What have I not asked you that I should have asked? (Concluding question)

Appendix C: Administrator Interview Questions

1. How long have you been an administrator at the middle school level? What grade(s) and content area(s) did you teach? (Background information)

2. How often do you deal with bullying situations that are referred to the office? Where do you think most bullying situations occur? (playground, classroom, halls, cafeteria, etc.)

3. What do you feel is the role of a teacher in dealing with bullying incidents? What do you feel is the role of an administrator in dealing with bullying incidents?

4. What strategies have you used to handle bullying situations in the office?

5. What are the processes for reporting a bullying incident?

6. How do teachers and administrators collaboratively address the critical issue of bullying incidents in the school setting? (professional learning community)

7. Have you noticed a reduction in the number of bullying incidences?

8. How does your district support your efforts in addressing bullying incidents?

9. How has the support affected your ability to handle bullying situations in the office?
10. What support do you feel would be beneficial to you as an administrator in order to foster a culture of trust and a culture of change at your school? (professional learning community)

11. In what ways, if any, have bullying incidences affected student learning in the classroom?

12. What have I not asked you that I should have asked? (Concluding question)