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Professional Learning Communities in a Juvenile Correctional Facility

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

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MA, Southeastern Louisiana University, 1997

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

There is little evidence concerning the impact of professional learning communities (PLCs) at juvenile correctional facilities. This qualitative case study explored the implementation of a PLC at a juvenile correctional facility school that housed students 10 to 19 years of age in southeastern United States. The purpose of this study was to understand the perceptions of teachers and paraprofessionals about how the PLC supported their work as they designed, constructed, and delivered instruction at the correctional facility. The social interactions among engaged educators through collaboration, collective inquiry, reflections, and communication derived from constructivist learning theory. Qualitative methodology included document review and structured face-to-face interviews with 4 teachers and 3 paraprofessionals. Following an inductive model, educators' perceptions were analyzed using an open coding process to derive categories, themes, and meaning. Five themes emerged: professional learning growth and benefits, teacher learning in PLCs, attitude adjustment of the culture, collaboration and sharing, and active engagement of paraprofessionals in PLCs. This study provided 5 recommendations: use allotted time, prioritize concerns, keep an open communication, discuss student-centered questions, and ensure supportive relationships. The findings indicated that the PLC supported teachers and paraprofessionals with strategies and accommodations to promote student achievement. This study has the potential to strengthen teacher collaboration and instruction to empower incarcerated students to succeed academically and become productive citizens.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The implementation of federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 [NCLB], 2002) with the objective that students receive a high-quality education has led to professionals being held accountable for improving student academic achievement. Teachers are held accountable for what the students are learning and the strategies or methods they are utilizing to teach. Due to these new accountability measures, teachers and administrative officials at a juvenile correctional facility school needed to initiate notable reform movements that would benefit the teachers as well as the students. Hence, this research studied teachers and paraprofessionals in a juvenile correctional facility school in which the students are housed at the facility and placed in classes with students of various academic deficits and levels. Therefore, teachers at this correctional facility school decided to use a professional learning community (PLC) to deal with the in-house challenges faced at their facility. PLCs were used for teachers to analyze students' work collaboratively with other teachers in order to develop prescriptive plans for each student (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Furthermore, teachers used the PLC to meet the demands of the curriculum and improve teacher practices and instructions. The PLC contributed to positive social change by strengthening collaboration and sharing between teachers to discuss, design, and implement individualized plans for improved teacher learning and student achievement.

The Problem

This qualitative research study took place at a correctional facility school in southeastern United States. As a residential facility, students are brought to class by two or as many as four guards who are constantly monitoring their actions at all times. Cameras have been installed and are constantly viewed to monitor the classroom activities as well. Throughout the school day, students are arriving or departing the classes. Some students depart to go to court or for medical or social services while others are new arrivals being orientated on the facility rules and procedures. Because of the classroom interruptions, the education staff determined it was necessary to work together to develop a plan to include the demands of this juvenile correctional facility while improving academic instruction that would lead to higher student achievement.

Incumbent and newly hired teachers decided to develop plans in 2011 to reform the juvenile correctional facility. As the facility enrolled students from various cultures and academic ability levels, teachers attempted to address the needs of all students. The teachers wanted the students to experience a positive education, which could lead to students becoming productive citizens. Productive citizenship derived from a solid education could deter students from future incarceration at the juvenile correctional facility. Therefore, teachers were willing to work with other professionals to develop individualized educational plans about the instructional methods and strategies derived from samples of student work, previous standardized testing, and current performance. Plans designed to reform this juvenile correctional facility school were needed to address the concerns of incarcerated students.

A highly qualified paraprofessional was hired for each classroom to assist the students in learning the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) using the teacher's lesson plans. Paraprofessionals worked in close proximity with the students to ensure that all Individualized Education Plan (IEP) modifications and accommodations were incorporated as prescribed by the IEP team. Additionally, paraprofessionals assisted teachers with preparing materials for instruction that allowed teachers more time to plan and teach the students.

Teachers and paraprofessionals needed to improve the quality of the correctional facility school. Individualized attention to the incarcerated students' needs was essential to achieve this. Therefore, a PLC was introduced, implemented, and utilized at this juvenile correctional facility school to prepare teachers and paraprofessionals with a meaningful reform movement to improve teaching instruction that could lead to lead to increased student achievement. This study examined the beliefs and perceptions of teachers and paraprofessionals following implementation of a PLC in a correctional facility school.

Background

In the early 1990s, this correctional school opened to provide a facility for juveniles separate from the facility for incarcerated adults. The plan was to provide juveniles with continued education in an alternative school setting to alleviate classroom instructional time missed during incarceration. There were five classrooms with a certificated teacher and highly qualified paraprofessional in each class. The classes taught by the educational staff were English Language Arts, social studies, science,

mathematics, and journey to careers. The curriculum also included physical education. A special education teacher reported to English Language Arts and mathematics 2 days a week to assist students with IEP accommodations and modifications as well as other students who needed assistance.

The education program at this facility offered an alternative online program for high school students to receive Carnegie units to graduate. Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) preparation was also offered. Furthermore, the educational program at the facility accommodated students from elementary through high school. Therefore, teachers focused on differentiated instruction since the students were at different grade and ability levels.

Teachers did not receive any academic information on students as they entered the facility to determine ability levels. After 3 to 5 days of incarceration, the previous school would send the student's grade level, IEP, standardized test, report card grades, and disciplinary records upon request by the education department at the juvenile correctional facility school. The students would then work at the recommended levels with the detailed accommodations and modifications from the previous school records.

The students' ages ranged from 10 to 19 years of age. The students were assigned to classes according to the severity of the crime committed rather than their grade level. Therefore, the ability level in each classroom ranged from second grade level to Grade 12. Most of the students were below grade level, and some students had identified exceptionalities with multiple academic deficits; however, a small number of students

were at or above grade level. Therefore, most students needed modifications and accommodations before, during, and after instructional time.

At the juvenile correctional facility, teachers were required to report back to work 3 days before to the first day of school. At the beginning of the school year, workshop presenters introduced the faculty and staff to recently developed policies, procedures, and information necessary to maximize the student's academic success (School District Handbook, 2011). The lead teacher at the juvenile correctional facility introduced the newly hired teachers to ongoing PLCs, which supports student learning as well as assists teachers to better understand the correctional facility (L. Chustz, personal communication, August 6, 2011). Unlike the traditional classroom, the framework of the juvenile correctional facility is highly structured with strict enforcement of systematic rules and close monitoring of the students at all times. Classroom management and behavior interventions are the concern of the facility correctional staff and not the teacher. The administrative staff informed teachers about the exact procedures that prevail in the correctional facility classroom: classes are monitored via video cameras, staff members are present in each class at all times, and staff monitor students' behaviors to prevent harm to self or others. As a result, teachers are aware that the facility staff controls the classrooms (D. Carter, personal communication, August 6, 2011).

Due to a desegregation lawsuit filed over 45 years ago, during the 2010-2011 academic year (AY), the administrators in the school district where the correctional facility was located placed teachers in schools (T. Bellavia, May 21, 2010). Teachers were informed that placement in a teaching position was not dependent upon their school

location choice, seniority, or effective teaching performance (Tangipahoa Parish Handbook, 2010). Because of practices put in place from the desegregation lawsuit, experienced teachers throughout the district were sometimes placed in positions outside of their specific educational training, such as in a juvenile correctional facility. Therefore, teachers were eager to implement a PLC to address new concerns as well as learn effective strategies to facilitate student learning in a juvenile correctional facility.

In 2010, Louisiana lawmakers enacted Act 54 to evaluate teachers by student growth (Louisiana Believes, 2010). The intended goal of the evaluation program was to identify struggling teachers based on observations and measures of student growth that took into account the student's prior achievement, special needs status, socioeconomic status, and behavior records. The Louisiana's Comprehensive Evaluation Model (COMPASS) is the evaluation tool used to empower teachers and principals with meaningful information and support (White, 2012). The COMPASS evaluation report identified teachers' (a) instructional methods, (b) approaches to involve students in their learning, (c) classroom management of behaviors, (d) organization of the class environment, and (e) strategies used to involve students with diverse needs. After realizing the many challenges that confront teachers in this correctional facility school, a teacher requested more collaboration and implemented a PLC to address the students' needs (R. Giordano, personal communication, September 23, 2011). As a result, incumbent and newly hired teachers decided to work together to develop a PLC to institute notable improvements in teacher instruction that addressed the needs of the

students at this juvenile correctional facility school and could lead to improved student performance.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

PLCs are used to promote ongoing professional collaboration opportunities among educators to help teachers identify their problems, integrate active learning, and propose solutions to achieve student success (Stewart, 2014). Within the PLCs, teachers have the opportunity to focus on their problems and find answers to accommodate incarcerated students (Robin & Lash, 2013). Collaboration among educators provides teachers with an opportunity to rethink, revise, and adjust teaching techniques and strategies for effective instruction (Pugach & Blanton, 2011).

Districts nationwide have implemented PLCs to support and enhance the ongoing learning of educators (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2009). As in education, businesses have also used the concept of PLCs to improve accountability and collaboration (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). PLCs are premised on five values. These values are (a) building the coalition, (b) clarifying expected goals and objectives, (c) learning collectively, (d) sharing values, visions, and personal practice, and € supporting conditions and personal practice (DuFour, 2012). As a result, PLCs work to enhance ongoing learning using developing, analyzing, and reflecting on concerns through collaboration in order to make adjustments to improve learning (DuFour et al., 2009; Pugach & Blanton, 2011; Stewart, 2014; Thompson et al., 2004).

Many teachers are not prepared to work in a juvenile correctional facility when leaving a university (Ely, 2011). PLCs provided an opportunity for these juvenile

correctional teachers to receive needed support from experienced teachers to make a smooth transition. Noll & Hoover (2009) indicated that teachers collaborate to transform education by changing how the teachers think and act in order to foster care and skills necessary for improving student achievement and promoting teacher learning. Therefore, PLCs provided support for teachers to transition smoothly from the traditional educational setting to a juvenile correctional facility school.

The juvenile correctional facility school's stated objective for the PLC was to prepare students for Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010) that the state adopted (PLC meeting August 6, 2011). The CCSS explicitly states that teachers must assess knowledge and skills that students lack in order to develop lessons and adjust classroom climate to enhance student achievement (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). Using experiences that teachers had acquired throughout their careers in PLCs, the experienced teachers worked with newly hired teachers to demonstrate awareness of which options met the needs of the students. Members found that PLCs enhanced their critical thinking, problem solving, and managerial agility techniques. Ultimately, teachers were using PLCs to develop lessons, follow requirements, and promote understanding of the CCSS (Stewart, 2014).

The experience of the juvenile correctional facility school is consistent with findings from the literature. Professionals collaborate on relevant issues derived from the immediate workplace, with PLC participants being supportive and accepting to promote learning (Mathur, Clark & Schoenfeld, 2009; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). Teachers and administrators implementing PLCs collaborate regarding individual concerns through

sharing and support (Stevenson, 2008; Stewart, 2014). PLCs improve student achievement and teachers are motivated to learn new ideas from their colleagues. In-house PLCs promote meaningful and organized collaboration that keep teachers enthusiastic and committed to their work (Nieto, 2009).

At the juvenile correctional facility school, findings indicated that the education staff implemented the in-house PLCs to discuss concerns that were relevant to the immediate facility in order to discover meaningful solutions to problems (Mathur et al., 2009). Findings indicated that teachers and administrators worked collaboratively in supportive environments to make decisions to improve performance and effectiveness (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Therefore, after professionals established the collaborative environment, the administrators developed a better understanding of the concerns of their teachers (Hord & Sommers, 2008). Collectively, teachers and administrators shared their role to develop meaningful solutions to the problems faced to improve performance. The literature indicated that the PLC used methods, strategies, procedures, modifications, and accommodations to promote learning among professionals. As a result, teachers improved teaching qualities and students perform better.

Problem Statement

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 and 2004 are examples of federal legislative reform efforts to improve education in the United States. The CCSS are another reform effort to help ensure that all students are ready for some form of post-secondary education (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). As stated, students at a correctional

facility have the right to an appropriate education (U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2006). As a result, juvenile students have the right to an education directed towards learning throughout life. In-house PLCs promoted teacher learning to ensure that students receive a quality education to meet their particular needs (Darling-Hammond, Chung-Wei, Andre, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). In an effective PLC, teachers are constantly reviewing data to develop strategies to accommodate students to make continuous progress and provide documentation of effort made to enable students to show growth. The CCSS recognized pedagogical content knowledge coupled with PLCs for meeting the expectations (Bausmith & Barry, 2011).

PLCs have been studied extensively as a tool to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Most of the research has focused on the experiences of certificated teachers and administrators. However, little literature exists about the implementation of PLCs in a correctional facility school and the role of paraprofessionals in PLCs. Therefore, this study makes an important contribution to the broader body of literature by providing research about the perceptions of teachers and paraprofessionals about the development and implementation of a PLC in a juvenile correctional facility.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions and beliefs of teachers and paraprofessionals after implementing PLCs at a juvenile correctional facility school. The lead teacher introduced professional learning communities to the educational faculty during the 2010-2011 AY. After the teachers researched and collaborated together, the education department decided to implement a

PLC that started during 2011-2012 AY. The PLC members included six teachers, five paraprofessionals and the lead teacher. The participants of the study included four of the six teachers, and three of the five paraprofessionals. The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the in-house ongoing PLC implemented in the juvenile correctional facility school.

Research Question

The following guiding question were developed to answer the guide the study:

RQ1: How do teachers of diverse prior teaching experience and training describe their participation in a PLC in a juvenile correctional facility?

A qualitative research design was used to answer the research questions. Qualitative research is the inquiry process of understanding a phenomenon holistically and reporting detailed views provided by informants in a natural setting (Creswell, 2012). The case study involves situating the case within the realm of the setting (Creswell, 2009). A descriptive qualitative case study was conducted. This case study describes the phenomenon and the context in which it occurred (Yin, 2003).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework draws from the constructivist theory of social learning (Schwandt, 2005). Teachers work in PLCs to build their profession and apply the concepts of collaboration, teacher learning, teamwork, and shared norms and values socially (Brodie, 2013; DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006). Educators seek better understanding, help others to consider alternatives, examine their assumptions, and collaboratively agree on the next step (Le Fevre & Robinson, 2014). Professionals

constructed new knowledge through collaborating, interacting, and sharing among professionals (Farrell, 2012; Wells & Feun, 2013). Constructivism theory helps to explain how knowledge and learning exist within the context of collaboration. This relates directly to learners gathering relevant information to enhance their skills collaboratively in PLCs, which involves intensive communication (Hayes, 2006). Educators participate in PLCs in an ongoing process to collect data regularly through collective inquiry and reflections to meet the needs of the students and gain knowledge professionally (DuFour, 2011).

The social aspect of PLCs ensures educators the opportunity to collaborate socially, learn by doing actively, and make decisions holistically (Neely, 2013). Constructivism emphasizes the importance of socially communicating among individuals to extend their understanding holistically and to construct new knowledge in an informal setting that is inductive (Dewey, 1938). Social learning brings about changes in self, belief systems, and lifestyle through collaboration (Mezirow, 1997). Educators engaged in their learning through social communication focus more on a common goal to reach a collaborative agreement and thereby become better prepared. Furthermore, teachers who work in an organized social group can create structures and cultures that embed collaboration and ensure efforts focused on the transformational process of positive change (Attard, 2012; McComish & Parson, 2013; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010; Mezirow, 1997).

Nature of the Study

This research study explored the effects of a PLC on teachers at a juvenile correctional facility as they design, construct, and deliver instruction conducive to that environment. The unique environment of a juvenile correctional facility classroom bears little resemblance to a traditional class. The juvenile correctional facility classes are much more militaristic and authoritarian (Geraci, 2002). Students are supervised and monitored before, during and after classes by staff members and cameras. Many correctional facility teachers find themselves teaching in a prison school due to circumstances rather than by choice (Wright, 2005). Most teachers are trained in subject areas such as mathematics, science, English, music, or social studies. Some are trained in other areas such as elementary education, special education, speech therapy, or vocational education. However, teachers are not trained to work in a correctional facility school. Therefore, most teachers are placed at a juvenile correctional facility school without having background knowledge of the commitments and challenges of teaching juvenile students in such a restricted environment. Often teachers who were working in a locked facility feel removed or isolated from the educational system as well as their cohorts. Additionally, juvenile correctional facility educators often have little to no preparation for teaching incarcerated students. As a result, teachers are unprepared to work with an inmate population of diverse at-risk learners. Furthermore, many of the professional development opportunities available to teachers are not geared to address the everyday challenges faced by teachers working in a juvenile correctional facility teaching court mandated students (New York State Department of Education [NYSDE], 2007).

This study used a qualitative case study design to learn about a phenomenon to interpret meaning (Yin, 2011). The study took place in an environment to which the participants were accustomed (their workplace). In this qualitative case study, data were collected from face-to-face interviews and reviewing of previous professional learning documents. The two different sources used to triangulate data were the face-to-face interviews and document reviews (Creswell, 2009). I used an inductive model for data analysis to provide meaning to the social situations of this study and to permit the development of categories or themes based on the study and not perceptions (Yin, 2011). Data analysis attempted to answer the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Definitions

The following terms and definitions guided this study:

Collective inquiry: Teachers openly willing to learn new strategies implemented and tested to transform their attitudes, beliefs, and habits in order to transform the culture of the school. (DuFour et al., 2008).

Collaboration teams: A group of teachers who share common beliefs and work towards common goals (DuFour, 2010).

Communities of Practice: Groups that generate shared knowledge, enhanced knowledge, or expertise, and who are committed to ongoing interactions and reflections (Wenger, 2007).

Common Core State Standards: A framework coordinated by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (2010) and the Council of Chief State

School Officers (CCSSO) to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare students for college and the workforce in our global economy and society.

Professional learning communities: A structure in which faculty come together in collaborative teams to engage in collective inquiry with a sense of shared purpose. The communities make collective commitments for continuous improvement with a focus on data (DuFour, 2010).

Assumptions

An assumption of the study was that teachers and paraprofessionals would establish a professional relationship to provide better lesson planning and delivery, higher scores, and improved teacher learning as well as improved student achievement. It was assumed that the participants were honest and told the truth. Another assumption was that as the researcher, I was able to set aside my biases. An additional assumption was that professional relationships would develop to allow teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate socially to give and accept constructive feedback in a positive manner.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this research study was a small faculty that consisting of teachers and paraprofessionals of whom eight of the eleven educational staff members volunteered to participate. The study focused only on their beliefs and perceptions of PLCs; therefore, managing student behavior and lesson planning were not a part of this study and therefore are not discussed.

A delimitation of this study included gathering information from a small number of teachers and paraprofessionals placed at this juvenile correctional facility school. Of

the faculty and staff at this school, only two were hired voluntarily while nine were administratively placed.

Professionals who desire to implement PLCs will find this study relevant. This study can apply to a wide variety of teachers in a regular school environment as well as a correctional facility school setting because it examined before and after effects of both teachers and paraprofessionals utilizing PLCs.

Limitations

The study was subject to four limitations. First, data collection took place at a unique correctional facility school. Second, the study was limited to eight participants: four of the six teachers and three of the five paraprofessionals. No administrators were included. Third, the study focused only on the PLCs at this juvenile correctional facility school. Lastly, as I am a part of the faculty, I have professional training and experience in special education. I may therefore have some biases related to my experiences and background.

Significance of the Study

Previous research has addressed PLCs in the traditional school setting. To date, minimal research had been conducted to provide explicit details of the collaboration, utilization, and implementation of PLCs within a juvenile correctional facility for teacher learning. Because the students committed a crime and have been incarcerated, there are different directives in a juvenile correctional facility than in a traditional school. The staff and cameras constantly monitor the students. Teachers undergo various professional development trainings to on the juvenile correctional facility ethics: (a) understand the

boundaries; (b) know the support policies, procedures, and model attributes; (c) act with self-discipline; and (d) take accountability for actions. The non-instructional staff members are responsible for classroom management and procedures, behavior interventions, and classroom organization.

This study provides an understanding of the value of PLCs within a juvenile correctional facility to promote deliberate improvement in instructional practice and in student learning.

Summary

This qualitative case study explored the perceptions of teachers and paraprofessionals after implementing PLCs in a correctional facility school. This introduction provided the background of what research revealed about PLCs in regular and correctional facility schools. Key terms were defined that related to the research question. Teachers and paraprofessionals who were a part of the PLC were asked to participate in this study.

In Chapter 2, the literature related to PLCs is reviewed. This chapter also describes the conceptual framework of PLCs that derives from the social constructivist theory. The search method and databases used are also described and a list of key search terms is provided.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

PLCs were introduced to the educators at a correctional facility school as a reform tool to improve student achievement. This study focused on teachers and paraprofessionals developing and implementing a PLC. This study also examined the perception of teachers and paraprofessionals after implementing a PLC at a juvenile correctional facility school. Chapter 2 describes the conceptual framework guiding this study and contains a review of current literature on PLCs and juvenile correctional facilities. The literature search used the following key terms: *teamwork, collaboration, professional learning communities, collective inquiry, correctional facility teachers, community of practice,* and *leadership* to provide information from other researchers who have previously studied PLCs. The Walden University Library was used to provide current and previous primary peer reviewed sources. Databases used were Education Research Complete, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), and Education: A SAGE Full-Text Collection, Multidisciplinary, Behavioral Studies and Psychology, ProQuest Central, and Teacher Reference Center. The discussion of PLCs in this chapter is further developed using the following subtopics: theory and practice of professional learning communities, professional learning communities, collaboration in professional learning communities, professional learning communities in a correctional facility, challenges of professional learning communities, and educators in a correctional facility. Chapter 2 concludes with a summary.

Theory and Practice of Professional Learning Communities

Using PLCs as a tool, educators focus on providing positive support for instructional improvement to develop recognition of their own learning and growth (Thessin, 2015). Learning occurs when teachers are granted the time and opportunity to work interdependently to identify strengths and areas in need of strengthening and to understand and collectively develop individualized plans for students (Thessin, 2015). Teachers collaborate and share socially to provide plans that yield academic success for students. The positive social interaction in PLCs leads to engagement in meaningful activities (Thessin, 2015).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of PLCs was derived from the social constructivist theory (Dotson, 2015). Social constructivist theory states that learning falls between cognitive (making sense in the mind) and social (developing meaning and understanding from social encounters) learning to construct new meaning internally. Furthermore, social constructivist theory includes methods of working and learning with others (Nordlof, 2014). Additionally, the method involves utilizing various backgrounds of individuals in a group to understand challenges and develop plans to solve problems together (Dewey, 1938). Some approaches that include the social constructivist theory to construct knowledge are peer collaboration, web-quest, and problem-based instructions (Nordlof, 2014). As stated, PLCs provide an innovative and productive learning environment through collaboration and sharing among individuals with the same vision and goal: data driven student achievement. Professionals need to ensure that learners are provided the

support to seek and find information that was valued to their immediate workplace as a team. There are four key characteristics of PLCs designed to construct knowledge through social interactions: (a) include a variety of professionals; (b) ensure each member focus on the same objective to construct knowledge, (c) stress the procedures of constructing knowledge, and (d) share learned knowledge within the group (Moser et al., 2015). Academic success is developed while implementing and utilizing PLCs to improve learning and student achievement. PLCs provide educators the opportunity to construct knowledge by working collaboratively, offering support, promoting engagement, and developing values and meaningful social learning (Moser et al., 2015).

PLCs seeking to reform educational practices should advance several types of learning: collaborative, active, in service to community, cooperative, self-directed, and problem-based (Weimer, 2012). Teachers work to construct knowledge by integrating new knowledge with what they have already learned through the interaction between social and cognitive learning (Ahn & Class, 2011). Learners are engaged while synthesizing and designing plans for their unique environment (Li, 2013). Therefore, considerations are taken to include various backgrounds of individuals in creating PLCs (Ahn & Class, 2011; Li, 2013; Weimer, 2012).

Improving teacher growth and success are often the goals of implementing PLCs. Teachers in PLCs work with other professionals to deliver effective instructions. PLCs also create opportunities for teachers to solicit feedback and advice for achieving goals as a team: to collaboratively develop knowledge that aids in delivering effective instruction to students (Poulos, Culbertson, Piazza, & d'Entremone, 2014). Furthermore, PLCs build

professional relationships as teachers share equally in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Engaging teachers in collaboration, demonstrating value as instructional partners, building professional relationships, and sharing equally in planning, implementation, and evaluation are crucial functions of teacher learning in PLCs (Poulos et al., 2014)

Teachers collaborate and share to remove the barriers of isolation and separation (Zhao, 2013). Five dimensions of PLCs identified were (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared personal practice (Zhao, 2013). Additionally, teachers involved should be supportive of their professional learning to recognize problems and deliver innovative solutions to their problems as a team (Poulos, et al., 2014). Furthermore, teachers in a PLC should agree on the vision, goals, and appropriate actions to be set by the team (Baxter, 2014). In PLCs, teachers share resources, observe other teachers in their classroom, and discuss teaching skills in a cooperative and supportive environment (Baxter, 2014). Therefore, teachers experience learning and success positively and supportively in a collaborative environment that promotes teacher growth and development in their immediate environment (Baxter, 2014; Poulos et al., 2014; Zhao, 2013).

Positive attitudes toward teaching occur when teachers are willing to overcome hardships to improve teacher learning and increased student performance (Hsu, 2014). In PLCs, attitudes and values are not seen or felt, but exist in the mind (De Nobile, Keeman, & Zarkos, 2014). Professionals form a relationship to work together to develop plans,

strategies, modifications, techniques, and other methods to help members to continue learning and increase student achievement (Cheng, 2009). Therefore, positive attitudes in PLCs may create new and higher value in education (Cheng, 2009; De Nobile et al., 2014; Hsu, 2015).

Sharing and collaboration to improve are very important in PLCs (Cornelissen et al., 2014). The learning communities access the expertise of professionals to share and develop collective knowledge to improve not just individual teachers learning but that of all professionals within the group (Lalor & Abawi, 2014). Effective teachers are learners and continue to reflect on their practices with other professionals, learning from each other (McKernan & McKernan, 2013). Teachers share and collaborate to gain and collect new knowledge in PLCs (Cornelissen, et al., 2014: Lalor & Abawi, 2014; McKernan & McKernan, 2013). The teachers also gained an understanding of how to collect and use data, practice the concepts and ask questions that are beneficial to their school and culture through sharing and collaboration.

In summary, the social constructivist theory indicates that social learning occurs through collaboration and sharing in PLCs. This social collaboration promotes improved teacher growth and positive attitudes. The professionals recommend new instructional strategies and accommodations that focus on student achievement using data to determine strengths and areas in need of strengthening. Professional relationships develop among peers.

Professional Learning Communities

The PLCs are implemented to help schools reform. Though there is not a concise definition, there are definitive characteristics of PLCs. When a group of teachers regularly meet as a team, PLCs are developed. The group discusses what students need to learn, develops ways to measure learning, analyze the past and present achievement data, set achievement goals, and then share and create lessons and strategies to improve upon those levels (DuFour & DuFour, 2013). PLCs provide an ongoing process through which teachers and administrators can collaborate to seek, share, and apply learning experiences to enhance goals for improved and effective teaching (Hord, 1997; Stewart, 2014). A PLC was described as an infrastructure that resulted in continuous school improvement (Hord, 2003; Hung & Yeh, 2013). Moreover, PLCs are implemented to capitalize on the collective strengths and attributes of the staff to solicit information to improve student achievement (Protheroe, 2008). Likewise, PLCs provide the opportunity for teachers to identify needs, seek answers, apply results, reflect, and share while continuously learning (Hord, 1997; Hung & Yeh, 2013; Stewart, 2014).

In a PLC, professionals work together to increase their learning and improve student achievement through collaboration (Feger & Arruda, 2008). PLCs are composed of educators willing to share and comment on their learning continuously through questioning and redirecting to foster excellence in their practice (Shernoff et al., 2011). PLC members experience growth by accumulating evidence from working with other professionals together as a team collaboratively (Reichstetter, 2006). Therefore, findings indicated that PLCs were effective in engaging learners to further their knowledge

through collaboration, sharing, reflecting, coaching, modeling, and sustaining support (Prothero, 2008; Reichstetter, 2006; Shernoff et al., 2011).

Improving Practice

Ongoing professional learning has been the key for many years for teachers to improve their practices. Lieberman and Miller (2008) suggested PLCs as the primary source for teachers to improve their practice by incorporating a discussion with a purpose. Every teacher in the study focused on the problem to derive solutions by other professionals from either best practice literature or previous experience to improve the quality of teaching and learning (Buchanan, 2012). Louis and Kruse (1993) indicated that teachers work together in PLCs to determine the existing problems they were facing to derive meaningful results from their data gathered to improve their learning and adequately yield growth in the performance of their students through reflective dialogue. The professionals or adult learners discuss students' performance and other problems to identify ways to accommodate other professionals or teachers to meet students' needs. Subsequently, teachers are continuously learning through meaningful collaboration to lead to insights that will contribute new perspectives on the content and purposes of inquiry and dialogue to benefit student outcome and teacher knowledge (Burke, 2013). Therefore, when PLCs are in place, colleagues are connected and instructions show relevance while professionals are experiencing ongoing professional learning. Furthermore, PLCs indicate why the lessons are taught, how to use the lesson, and how to make the lesson meaningful to the students to promote engagement and motivation while

teachers are learning through support from other teachers (Buchanan, 2012; Burke, 2012; Dopplet et al., 2009; DuFour, 2014; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Louis & Kruse, 1993).

In summary, are developed as a reform tool. Teachers discuss what students needed to learn, develop ways to measure learning, analyze the past and present achievement data, set achievement goals and then share and create lessons and strategies to improve student learning. In the PLCs, teachers are willing to share and comment on learning continuously through questioning and redirecting to foster excellence in the teaching practice. The insights lead to new perspectives on the content to benefit student outcome and teacher knowledge.

Teacher Learning in Professional Learning Communities

PLCs support achieving and improve underachieving learners (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010; Goodwin, 2014). The key to improving teaching is to ensure that teachers participated in a PLC that focused on learning (Timperley, 2011). A mixed-method study involving four middle schools from one district and four middle schools from another district in the same county explored the implementation of PLCs (Wells & Feun, 2013). This study indicated that the district that understood the benefits of PLCs and gave the opportunity to try new roles promoted growth that nurtured and sustained on-going teamwork (Wells & Feun, 2013). The teachers developed learning that took place after teachers actively reflected and shared their prior experiences, observed other teachers, studied and applied best practices as a team to improve their practice with inclusive support and respect (Goodwin, 2014; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010; Owen, 2014; Wells & Feun, 2012).

To meet the needs of the students, PLCs are used as a tool for teachers to communicate through collaboration with peers (Bryk et al., 2010). A 3-year study focused on seven faculty members who implemented a PLC using a critical friends approach in a higher education institute (Moore & Hicks, 2014). This study indicated that teachers elicited resources that made notable improvements in the faculty members while collaborating with peers from a variety of disciplines and made meaningful connections to understand educational concepts (Moore & Hicks, 2014). Similarly, a qualitative study involving one-eighth grade interdisciplinary team located in the Midwest explored the differences of common planning time and PLCs (Dever & Lash, 2013). The findings indicated PLCs provided opportunities for teachers to gain new knowledge about their teaching from other teachers; whereas, common planning time devolved into nonacademic talk (Dever & Lash, 2013). Teachers also experienced the most powerful development through interactions with colleagues to build ongoing professional knowledge that included ongoing professional dialogue and peer support (Griffith et al., 2013; Little, 2006). Therefore, PLCs enable learners to expand their knowledge through interactions with other colleagues that are meaningful and beneficial to solve problems on an ongoing basis in universities and school districts (Dever & Lash, 2013, Griffith et al., 2013; Moore & Hicks, 2014).

PLCs enable professionals to develop interventions explicitly for students to receive extra help or advanced work to support their learning promptly (DuFour & Mattos, 2013; DuFour, 2014). Peer collaboration in PLCs is very important and powerful tool for increasing effectiveness (Burke, 2013). PLCs focus on learning rather than

teaching and develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy (DuFour, 2012). Similarly, PLC members work collaboratively on learning issues and held accountable for actions taken to improve students learning continuously (DuFour, 2007). Collaborative team effort is more powerful when members learn together rather than work in isolation (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Furthermore, a very powerful strategy for promoting teacher learning to improve student achievement is to ensure that teachers work collaboratively to determine what students need to learn, provide evidence of student progress through ongoing assessment, and to use the evidence in professional discussions and evaluations to plan and improve teacher instructions (Jones, 2014). Within the communities of practice, teachers make effective decisions (Mink, 2014). Hence, PLCs are ongoing to build teachers confidence to make decisions, shape their teaching and practice, and continue changing and trying new things. Additionally, professional relationships developed promote learning effective instructions to improve academic achievement in a community of practice (DuFour, 2014; DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Jones, 2014; Mink, 2014).

Well-developed PLCs enhance teacher adhesiveness, improve teacher learning, increase student achievement, and promote better job satisfaction (DuFour & Marzano, 2015). Teachers work together to prescribe strategies needed to benefit students at their workplace. Lieberman and Wood (2008) studied colleagueship in the National Writing Project during a summer institute to allow teachers to work together and understand the power of learning from each other. From the institute, teachers were open to learning, shared strategies, became writers, and left the institute with an array of tried and tested practices to the classroom. Colleagueship in a PLC was meaningful to the adult learner to

receive in-house assistance through participation, collaboration, sharing, and supporting the concerns brought forth (Merriman & Barry, 2011). PLCs enhanced teacher adhesiveness while teachers are actively collaborating and learning new techniques for improved teacher learning (DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Lieberman & Wood, 2000; Merriman & Barry, 2011).

In PLCs, teachers identify and discuss dilemmas to find solutions. Teachers are able to create lessons and instructional strategies for students after planning, researching, reflecting and evaluating within PLCs (Moore & Hick, 2014). The study used an instituted protocol to determine if the students were meeting, close to meeting, not meeting or exceedingly meeting the standards assessed. In the PLC, teachers gathered to understand used strategies, show or tell what have worked, and find other methods to address problems and concerns (Moore & Hicks, 2014). Accordingly, within PLCs, teachers were dedicated to learning while developing autonomy through independent and voluntary collaboration (Hargreaves et al., 2013). The teachers were self-directed and motivated to try things out while continuing to learn and change their practice to address relevant problems and concerns (Hargreaves et al., 2013; Moore & Hicks, 2014).

After PLCs are planned, established, implemented, and evaluated, school leaders can ensure the communities sustain for long-term school improvement. The improvements are tailored to the needs of the school and the students. Three themes emerge when considering the centrality leadership for sustaining educational change in schools: aligning values between teachers and principal, creating an organizational

capacity for change, and empowering teachers to create collaborative learning cultures in PLCs (King, 2011).

A successful PLC model was introduced in Wales to empower teachers to innovate, develop and learn together. It also outlined features needed to be effective: respect and trust, supportive leadership, shared vision, strong and supportive relationships among with professionals as well as a focus on impact and outcomes of learners (Harris & Jones, 2010). Accordingly, a team of professionals came together with stated goals and vision to critically examine data and reflect on the issues at hand. The members built a professional relationship to improve teaching instructions to increase student outcome. In the well-constructed PLCs that included members passionate about student learning and owned by the profession, teachers experienced improved student outcomes (Harris & Jones, 2010).

PLCs are reflective dialogues of legitimate professional development to support systematic change (Christiansen & Robey, 2015). Teachers work and learn together, reflect, and share their findings to deepen their understanding (Burke, 2013). Collaboration, inquiry and collective responsibility are practiced to improve teacher learning and instruction. Personal confidence and preparation are improved after implementing PLCs (Noordegraaf, 2007). PLCs enable teachers to study new methods, strategies, interventions and approaches to improve their professional practice together as a team (Riveros et al., 2012). As a result, teachers understand the goals and expectations within their PLCs to improve their learning and build ongoing practice to promote

systematic change (Christiansen & Robey, 2015; Noordegraaf, 2007; Owen, 2014; Riveros et al., 2012)

Collaboration

Gajda and Koliba (2008) used an improvement framework called *teacher collaboration* to oversee or evaluate the effectiveness of PLCs in stages. These stages were to raise awareness of collaboration literacy, evaluate collaboration among peers, provide ways to initiate collaboration, recognize and inventory communities of practice, pinpoint and propose needed changes of collaboration teams, and acknowledge improvements teachers have accomplished. Through PLCs, teachers worked under the premise of thinking and doing. As noted, collaboration was an ongoing process to enable continuous learning (Gadja & Koliba, 2008).

In PLCs, teacher learning is long-term, geared specifically for the teachers and students-at-large to increase educators' effectiveness to yield to high student achievement that integrates theory and research (DuFour & Marzano, 2015). The PLCs held in-house allow teachers to learn together and collectively commit to student improvement and teacher learning on an ongoing basis (Harris & Jones, 2010). Teachers are given the opportunity to work together to share their eclectic knowledge of effective teaching. Allowing teachers to make judgments about their learners' needs, their needs, and reflect on the tactics used are true indications of significantly improving practice (Griffith et al., 2013; Katz et al., 2009**).** Thus, teachers are afforded the opportunity to make judgments within their communities of practice to meet their need. Furthermore, teachers reflect and

share collective accountability for their actions from research and best practice (DuFour & Marzano, 2015; Griffith et al., 2013; Harris & Jones, 2010; Katz et al., 2009).

Teachers are motivated to learn when the school goals, policies, and procedures were blended together to reform the school's quality intentionally (Thoonen et al., 2011). The study explored the impact of motivational factors, transformational leadership, and school organizational conditions in PLCs from elementary schools in the Netherlands. The results indicated that teacher involvement, motivational factors, and organizational conditions were controlling predictors for teaching practices. Subsequently, this type of transformational leadership was required to stimulate teachers' learning and motivation for improvement of organizational conditions (Thoonen et al., 2011).

In summary, the PLCs grant the teachers the opportunity to try new roles to promote growth that nurtured and sustained ongoing learning. Teachers collaborate with other professionals to learn tried and tested accommodations to meet the needs of students. The PLCs focus on learning rather than teaching and develop a stronger sense of self-efficacy. Teachers use assessments as evidence of student progress that lead to professional discussions and evaluations to plan and improve teacher instructional strategies. According to research, PLCs led to improvements that tailored the needs of the school, teachers, and students.

Collaboration in Professional Learning Communities

PLCs contribute to a vehicle for change by addressing teaching practice, schooling, and education through collaboration (Honingh & Hooge, 2013). A study of pre-service teachers was conducted three semesters prior student teaching at a university

before, during and at the end of semester practice (Hoaglund et al., 2014). Each participant was required to review student data, research, and problem solve. Findings indicated that pre-service teachers needed to know that collaborating in PLCs was the tool of learning for their future practice. In addition, the pre-service teachers found out that more work involved organizing, volunteering, and leading, to build a foundation to understand ongoing learning required to teach effectively. However, according to the survey, pre-service teachers implementing PLCs were more apt to admitting their mistakes, sharing their issues, and supporting their decisions through collaboration (Hoaglund et al., 2014). Teachers collaborated in an oriented environment to participate in decision-making, satisfied with their decisions and formalize their participation to enhance learning (Lomos et al., 2011). Therefore, educators collaborate in PLCs to experience learning in their school with their colleagues (Honingh & Hooge, 2013). As a result, teachers engage in PLCs understand the work involved and are more apt to be motivated to collaborate and foster active learning in their school (Hoaglund et al., 2014; Lomos et al., 2011).

The PLCs provide teachers with a supportive environment to promote learning through exchanging ideas to become successful and effective educators (Hord & Summers, 2008). According to the study, the school administrator was the catalyst for creating PLCs equipped with an underlying premise where deliberate and carefully constructed learning to yield higher student achievement (Hord & Sommers, 2008). A case study investigated two high schools in California with a sample of three experienced teachers from one school and three other teachers with more than 15 years of experience

involving PLCs as a reform that evolved collaboration for school improvement (Levine, 2011). This study revealed that collaboration in PLCs created resources that were meaningful to help experienced teachers change and that all teachers can learn when experienced teachers are involved in their learning (Levine, 2011). Therefore, powerful PLCs prepare teachers for ongoing teacher collaboration to grasp ideas and resources needed that lead to effective instruction (DuFour et al., 2005; Levine, 2011).

PLCs provide opportunities for teachers to learn from their practice, research, and experience to help expand their knowledge **(**Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012). In an urban school district, 200 PLCs were developed to collaborate on issues directly involving teaching and instruction (Williams, 2013). Findings of this mixed method study indicated that learning took place through professional collaboration after working with their team instead of isolation (Williams, 2013). Therefore, learning among teachers start by providing the opportunity for experienced teachers to connect with struggling teachers and to increase their knowledge to become effective and highly qualified (Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012; Williams, 2013).

In a PLC, teachers learn different strategies, methods, procedures, accommodations, and modifications to promote student achievement. Lieberman and Wood (2008) provided an example of their study during a summer institute. Teachers were able to see the benefit of working together by sharing their best strategies, learning from each other, and being open to learning as a lifelong process. All of the teachers were able to bring back new practices tried and tested (Lieberman & Wood, 2008). Furthermore, collaboration in PLCs generate an effective tool to promote learning in

large or small school districts as well as universities to bring about positive change (Lieberman & Mace, 2010; Lieberman & Wood, 2008; Mindich & Lieberman, 2012; Williams, 2013).

To address teachers' needs, allotted time is set-aside for teachers to collaborate and work together as a team (Harris & Jones, 2009). Problems existing in their immediate work environment are their concern. Colleagues of teachers and other professionals initiate professional development to learn in the teacher learning community. A 3-year study on urban schools indicated that social relationships were crucial for novices not only because the relationships served as a conduit for building skills, but because colleagues' connectedness fostered ownership to engender longer commitment to their professional career of teaching (Shernoff et al., 2011). The three broad themes from the findings were professional isolation, limited time for collaboration, and feasibility of PLCs to create opportunities for collaboration alleviate the isolation of the teaching profession. The findings supported the social role that peer collaboration, social connection, and supportive learning community play in helping teachers' performance in instruction, management, and organization to grow professionally (Shernoff et al., 2011).

Teachers collaborating with professionals in learning communities are provided to improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning to address student performance and achievement through shared values, inquiry, and reflection (Allen, 2013; DuFour & DuFour, 2010; Egan & Hopkin, 2009; Gates, 2010; Riveros et al., 2012). Learning in PLCs creates opportunities for teachers to work together cohesively. In addition, professionals gain access to ideas, strategies, methods, approaches, and strategies from

other professionals to improve teachers' learning in the context of their group for clearer knowledge and understanding (DuFour, et al., 2005; Hung & Yeh, 2013). Furthermore, teachers improve their learning and practice in PLCs (Riveros et al., 2012).

The National Staff Development Council included collaboration and learning communities in staff development to improve the learning by organizing learning communities aligned with the school and district (NSDC, 2001). Additionally, NSDC (2011) acknowledged that educators are most effective when they are active learners and problem solvers. Hence, the new version stated that PLCs increase educators' effectiveness that result in improving students learning. The professionals within the communities work together to promote members that are data-driven, problem-solving, and reflecting on shared goals (Crow, 2012). Teachers continue to grow professionally after analyzing, planning, implementing, and evaluating their shared and supported learning environment to promote teacher learning and improve student achievement (Crow, 2012). Therefore, collaboration in PLCs allows teachers the opportunity to work and learn from other colleagues to invigorate professional learning continuously (Crow, 2012; NSDC, 2011).

PLCs promote ongoing professional learning through shared ongoing problems to yield or contest problems and proposed solutions to achieve student success (DuFour & DuFour, 2015). Sharing ideas through collaboration among professionals with the intent of accepting and listening to others provided another opportunity for teachers to design a program to share academic success. However, PLCs were found to be an ongoing powerful staff development approach for improvement (Hord, 1997). Passing information

on and looking inward for insight will not result in a learning community that is ongoing, sustained, long-term, and meaningful (Huber, 2010). For that reason, PLCs are used as a development tool to utilize, construct, and share ideas. The professional learners develop a better understanding of their learning style while socially communicating with other professionals (Huber, 2010).

In summary, teachers address teaching practice through collaboration with other peers. Time for teachers to collaborate has been a problem in the past. However, research revealed that allotted time should be set aside for teacher collaboration. Research also stated that collaboration was a vital tool for ongoing learning and improvements. In PLCs, teachers participate in decision-making and formalize their involvement to enhance learning teaching strategies and methods. Through collaboration, experienced teachers connect with struggling teachers to improve their knowledge to become effective and highly qualified. Additionally, teachers gain access to ideas, strategies, methods, and approaches.

Professional Learning Communities in a Juvenile Correctional Facility

PLCs are vital in a juvenile correctional facility (Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010). Teachers address juvenile defenders with various types of disabilities and grade levels. Furthermore, most correctional educators are not trained to identify students in need of a full evaluation from a multidisciplinary team or cannot identify problems the students are currently facing academically (Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010). Experienced teachers in a juvenile correctional facility help newly hired teachers by sharing ideas to inform new teachers of what have been implemented and tested to improve student achievement. Noll

& Hoover (2009) revealed that teachers share ideas to transform education for the troubled juveniles to develop skills necessary to navigate life's challenges successfully.

Teachers' continuous training and development in PLCs at a juvenile correctional facility enable teachers to learn and students to achieve academically. Lang and Page (2010) indicated that correctional educators need to be included to make the connection linking research and practice: planning stage, implementation stage, and evaluation stage. Interventions, modifications, and strategies, which experienced teachers used, are shared and applied (Lang & Page, 2010). Therefore, in the PLCs, professionals communicate their concerns with other teachers to provide incarcerated students with appropriate strategies and approaches to educating confined students to become productive citizens effectively and efficiently (Lang & Page, 2010; Mathur et al.,2009; Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010; Noll & Hoover, 2009).

In summary, PLCs are essential in a juvenile correctional facility. Teachers need to address the needs of the juvenile defenders with various types of disabilities and ability levels. Ideas are shared with other professionals to transform education for the troubled juveniles. Continuous training and development enable teachers to determine strengths and areas in need of strengthening to promote improved student achievement. Therefore, teachers collaborate to provide the incarcerated students with appropriate strategies and approaches.

Challenges of Professional Learning Communities

The development of PLCs creates many challenges: a) physical (time, resources, and space), b) interpersonal and social (administration, leadership), and c) personal

(commitment and dedication, willingness to share and learn, understanding the PLCs, and the importance of relevance) elements are noted challenges (Stewart, 2014; Yamraj, 2008). Similarly, time to build a strong rapport and perceived increased workload are challenges in PLCs (Brown et al., 2013; Chao et al., 2010). Additional challenges include sustainability and rapidly changing demands of education in our society. Lack of communication and resources, resistance to change, time restraints, and the inability to relate to different cultural, social economic and language backgrounds are noted challenges of PLCs (Lujan & Day, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010; Wells & Feun, 2012).

Sustainability is often a problem for PLCs (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). PLCs start fine and weaken over time unless the administration keeps helping, supporting, and tracking the PLCs (Smith & Gillespie, 2007). Furthermore, sustainability requires all members involved are seeking and open to change of existing beliefs and values (McMaster, 2013). As a result, time to build rapport, lack of communication, sustainability, resistance to change, and support are notable challenges of implementing PLCs (Brown et al., 2013; Chao et al. 2010; Lujan & Day, 2010; McMaster, 2013; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010, Smith & Gillespie, 2007; Stewart, 2104; Wells & Feun, 2012; Yamraj, 2008).

Well-grounded professional collaborative communities do not solve all problems. Some problems arise while adults agree and disagree through interactions with their colleagues. Stanley (2011) pointed out that professional teacher study groups provide educators with the knowledge and skills needed to collaborate and manage conflict as it

arises. Despite the challenges, perceived benefits of having PLCs include maximizing time, professional collaboration and personalizing professional development to meet specific needs of students-at-large (DuFour et al., 2009). Similarly, through collaboration, educators are learning from their colleagues in PLCs (Tan et al., 2010).

In summary, some noted challenges of PLCs are physical, social, personal, and maintaining sustainability. Research indicates that time is the leading challenge. Other challenges include but are not limited to willing to share, resistance to change, the relevance, lack of communication and resources and language backgrounds. In contrast, research indicates perceived benefits of having PLCs that include maximizing time, professional collaboration and personalizing professional development to meet specific needs of students.

Educators in a Juvenile Correctional Facility

Educational authorities established rights for all including students to receive an education including juvenile offenders (U. S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2006). In 1984, the Young Offenders Act (YOA) passed to enforce rehabilitation of juvenile offenders to reintegrate the offenders back in society to ensure that the young person learns other alternatives than crime and protect the public. Youth at the correctional facility for this study live at the facility, which means they are in the full custody of the facility. Teachers have restraints and guidelines to follow at a juvenile correctional facility. Restraints to effective instructions in juvenile correctional education programs are the lack of collaboration among peers, discussion groups, hands-on experiments and forum discussions due to violence and criminal intent to bring about

harm to self or others (Allen, 1988; Hackman, 1997; Houchin et al., 2010; Parkinson & Steurer, 2004).

Gagnon and Barber (2014) indicated that teachers rarely use research based instructional methods due to lack of resources and restraints enforced by the facility. Furthermore, teachers need to be trained to address youth offenders' educational issues to deliver instructions to match the learners' needs. Despite the crimes committed by youth offenders, all students are protected under the law to receive a free and appropriate education. Therefore, teachers must focus on adapting instructional methods to ensure that the incarcerated juveniles receive research-based instructions to meet their individual needs (Gagnon & Barber, 2014; U. S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division, 2006).

Successful implementation of research-based instructional approaches remains needed to develop attainable goals with program-based changes was noted to make a positive difference in incarcerated youth (Mathur & Schoenfeld, 2010). Teachers analyze information critically through inquiry with other teachers collectively. PLCs obtain meaningful, relevant, and ongoing professional learning in-house with specific concerns for this type of environment (DelliCarpini, 2008). Furthermore, professional development in a juvenile correctional facility is based on available knowledge to prevent students from going to prison and being a repeat offender within the juvenile system (Houchin, et al., 2010). According to previous data, educational staff focuses on the youth's academic, behavior, and social needs in a juvenile correctional facility school.

Effective instruction in a juvenile correctional facility is a crucial factor for improvement of educational structure for incarcerated students in a full inclusion setting

with the youth having different learning deficits and abilities (Mathur, et al., 2009). A survey in Louisiana indicated that the major challenge for educators teaching in juvenile facilities was the inability to engage the interest of the students (Mathur & Shoenfeld, 2010).

Many incarcerated juveniles have experienced school failure by falling behind their peers, repeating one or several grades, or dropping out of school. Moreover, there is an ongoing need for effective instructional practices that addresses academic deficits that are detrimental to the improvement of educational outcomes (Gagnon, et al., 2012). This study also indicated that evidenced-based instruction and practices are beneficial for juvenile incarcerated students. Teachers often do not have the skills to accommodate incarcerated youth to meet their academic and behavioral needs (Houchins, et a., 2009). For that reason, effective instruction in a juvenile correctional facility needs to incorporate positive student-teacher rapport, positive interactions, and a sense of personal self-efficacy and control to manage emotions (Mathur, et al., 2009).

In the juvenile correctional facility where the study was conducted, positive behavioral interventions support (PBIS) was often used as an alternative approach to focus on discipline in a guarded 24 hour secured facility (Jolivette & Nelson, 2010). Both teachers and students had to abide by the authoritarian approach of a correctional facility (Parkinson & Steurer, 2004). Therefore, changing the behavior and the mindset of the incarcerated youth are the priority of learning academic subjects (Jolivette & Nelson, 2010; Parkinson & Steurer, 2004).

In summary, educators in juvenile correctional facility schools have many challenges. Despite the challenges noted such as: restraints, lack of training, inability to engage the interest of the students, and rarely using research based instructions, educators need to develop strategies to yield higher academic performance to reintegrate the student back into society. PLCs are found to be essential to prepare teachers to use data-driven teaching strategies to provide the appropriate lessons and needed strategies to experience success in academics. Therefore, PLCs in a juvenile correctional facility school provide meaningful, relevant, and ongoing professional learning for teacher improvement and student achievements.

Summary

The purpose of this research was to understand the in-house ongoing PLCs that teachers implemented in a juvenile correctional facility. The goal of the study is to understand their participation and involvement through qualitative data collection and analysis from previous document study and face-to-face interviews. According to the literature, PLCs can assist and permit growth through collaboration, sharing and interacting with other professional socially. PLCs can improve student achievement and teacher learning through collaborating ideas, sharing, supporting and reflecting on teacher learning and student achievement to elicit and solve needed problems. For instance, experienced teachers can provide solutions previously tested with previous students. PLCs can also lead to teacher competence rather than incompetence by working with veteran teachers. Few studies are found on implementing PLCs in a juvenile correctional facility. However, the review of literature also revealed that PLCs could be an effective

form of professional development for teachers. The teacher can no longer work in isolation and be successful in reaching students; learning as they share their beliefs, values, and vision (DuFour, 2005; Zepeda, 2012). PLCs provide opportunities to empower teachers to participate in building-wide decision-making (Grenda & Hackman, 2014). The following are features of an effective PLC: content knowledge, time, active participation, collaboration, and sharing (Desimone, 2009).

Teacher learning is the focus of PLCs to promote meaningful teacher learning that lead to improved student learning. The literature described how teachers used their time in a juvenile correctional facility school, continued learning the profession while working directly with other teachers, conferred with colleagues and administrators, visited other classrooms, and engaged in other professional development to become more effective and successful.

Chapter 3 of the dissertation describes the qualitative methodology for this study. Chapter 4 will provide a description of the results, and Chapter 5 will provide discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to gather information in order to understand the teachers' and paraprofessionals' perceptions about the PLC utilized in a juvenile correctional facility school. The PLC was implemented as a professional development tool to promote teacher learning and improve student achievement. Research exists on the effectiveness of utilizing PLCs in a regular school setting; however, there was little research on their effectiveness in a juvenile correctional facility. Through qualitative data collection methods, I gained an understanding of teachers' perceptions after their participation in a newly implemented PLC. The goal of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of perceptions about the PLC in a juvenile correctional facility.

The guiding question for this study: How do teachers of diverse prior teaching experience and training describe their participation in a PLC in a juvenile correctional facility?

Research Design and Rationale

Qualitative case studies investigate a phenomenon in its real-world context and interpret meaning (Yin, 2011). Qualitative research explores and understands the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2009). In contrast, quantitative research design and method is an inquiry based on a prediction and statistical data from testing a theory with variables to determine whether the prediction of the theory is true (Creswell, 2009). The goal of this research study is to

explore a PLC implemented in a juvenile correctional facility. The research questions are qualitative in nature by investigating how teachers describe their participation, sharing, and collaboration in a PLC. I elicited views and perspectives of the participants, contributed insights into emerging concepts to help explain social behaviors, and strived to use multiple sources of evidence (Creswell, 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006; Merriam & Barry, 2011; Yin, 2011). This case study focused on teachers working at a juvenile correctional facility for youth offenders. The rationale for using a qualitative research method was to interpret meaning, perspectives, and involvements elicited from participants at a juvenile correctional facility that had recently implemented a PLC. Therefore, this qualitative research design gained holistic perspective through expressive language describing the impressions, beliefs, and values of the participants (Creswell, 2009).

Setting and Participants

The research site was a juvenile correctional facility in the southeastern United States. During the academic school year, the average daily population was 65 students enrolled in grades three through twelve. The school served an average of 748 students per year. The educational staff at the school consisted of seven teachers and five paraprofessionals. All educational staff members were in one PLC. The natural setting provided the richest data for a qualitative research study. I was a part of the staff but was not a research participant. The years of experience for the teaching staff ranged from beginning teachers without any classroom experience to veteran teachers with many years of classroom experience. The participant sample was comprised of teachers and

paraprofessionals who were all active members of the PLC. All of the educational staff employed was invited to participate. The desired sample for the study consisted of four out of six teachers and three out of five paraprofessionals. Therefore, a holistic picture was derived from the views of participants in the school setting (Creswell, 2009).

At an initial faculty meeting I shared an overview of the proposal with the teachers and paraprofessionals. A written invitation was given to each of the professional learning members at the meeting to invite them to participate in the study. Faculty and staff were asked to volunteer at the meeting. Consent forms were issued for prospective participants to review to help them decide if they wished to participate. Teachers and paraprofessionals volunteering to participate in the study were asked to contact me via private conversation, e-mail, or telephone. Before starting each interview, I reviewed the consent form with the participant, and each participant signed the consent form before starting the interview.

The relationship between the researcher and participants had been established through ongoing collaboration and sharing after developing, implementing and utilizing a PLC at the site. I ensured each participant that all information was confidential and that their names and other personal identity information would be protected from disclosure.

Data Collection

Before collecting data, I secured IRB approval #02-05-15-0198663, and all signed consent forms from participants were received. In this qualitative case study, previous documents of the PLC meetings, documents related to training from the facility, and open-ended interviews were used. The qualitative method was used to explore and

understand the meaning of the perceptions of teachers working at a juvenile facility as they reflected on their experiences as members of a PLC. (Creswell, 2009). I conducted the interviews, interpreted the meaning of the data, and protected the confidentiality of the participants.

Document Data

The first phase of this study consisted of reviewing previous PLC meetings. I collected documents related to the juvenile correctional facility PLC from the previous 4 years to understand the central ethos of the facility. The lead teacher approved this study and provided the documents from previous training and support for the PLC and for individual teachers' needs. The documents revealed information relevant to answering the guiding question.

Interviews

The interviews were the primary data source for this study. Information was elicited via structured face-to-face interviews in order to gain a better understanding of the teacher learning that had taken place after the teachers had developed and implemented a professional learning community. Face-to-face interviews took place before or after school for the convenience of the participants. The initial interview questions are located in Appendix A. Follow-up interview questions were added to the protocol to probe for more details and encourage expansion of ideas. Examples of probe questions are: "Can you give me an example?" "Can you tell me more about your participation?"

Each participant designated time to be interviewed in a private room in a comfortable setting. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio recorded and downloaded to my computer. To elicit more in-depth responses, open-ended and follow-up questions with prompts were asked to encourage full and meaningful responses from the participants' based on their knowledge and experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

I established a trusting relationship with each participant (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). I provided an explanation of the purpose of the interview and scheduled interview time. Participants were asked to suggest or designate a time and place convenient for the interviews.

All of the interview recordings were downloaded and saved to my computer and on a password protected external flash drive for back up. The data will be kept securely encrypted for a 5-year period per the study requirements. I transcribed the recordings in a word processing document and replaced names with numbers in order to protect confidentiality. A research log and reflective journal were also used.

Role of the Researcher

I reviewed previous PLC documents and collected data throughout the research process. In addition to notes taken, I audio recorded and transcribed all teacher-researcher interviews. I am currently a participating member of the PLC at the correctional facility where the research took place. I had developed a style of interacting with participants that was supportive of the process of data gathering (Knapik, 2006).

Data Analysis

Data analysis of a qualitative study was designed to construct and interpret meaning from information gathered in an attempt to answer the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This study was inductive since the teachers provided their perceptions regarding how teachers implemented and developed a PLC in a juvenile correctional facility (Yin, 2011). To provide meaning to the social implications of this study, an inductive model follows these steps: (a) define the research question, (b) collect data using various methods, (c) arrange data, (d) analyze data to look for patterns, (e) use patterns and findings to develop a theory, and (f) compare the results with existing literature (Yin, 2011). This inductive analysis permitted the development of categories, propositions, and eventually meaning based on the study (Yin, 2011).

Computer software was used to examine and analyze data. The InterviewStreamliner, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), was used for coding, retrieving, and recording text from the interviews (Pruijt, 2012). The interview data was categorized and assigned based on themes derived from the participants' responses to questions. The qualitative document analysis framework provided structure for documents analyzed (Atheide, Coyle, DeVriese, & Schneider, 2008).

After carefully reading the data, I organized, coded and managed the data. I searched through the documents and face-to-face interview data to find words and short phrases for interpretation of data. Next, I collected all the words and phrases from all the interviews. I looked for overlapping words and phrases to shorten the list. Data also

provided evidence of patterns of similarities and differences to interpret the meaning of the PLC at a juvenile correctional facility. Discrepant data were noted and documented. Finally, I allocated each category to a color and posted to a sheet to develop themes. Five themes emerged during the inductive analysis process, which are discussed in Chapter 4 of this study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Two major methods to ensure the credibility of a qualitative research study are member checking and triangulation. I shared the working draft with the participants as a form of member checking to verify that information was interpreted correctly or in need of revision (Yin, 2011; Glesne, 2011). Triangulation confirmed the information gathered from previous documents and face-to-face interviews. It involve using more than one method of collecting data, comparing perspectives of different teachers, and increasing the validity of the study (Glesne, 2011). The data were compared to determine similarities and differences between documents and interviews. Data gathered from a variety of sources are vital for providing confidence when reporting findings (Yin, 2009). I was seeking to understand the phenomena from the participants' viewpoints about the performance of the PLCs to present unbiased data (Yin, 2009).

Patterns of similarities and differences of the documents and views of participants as well as discrepancies were noted. All perspectives were acknowledged, and all discrepant data were identified during the coding process. The discrepant data were examined in detail and reported on the findings.

Protection of the Rights of Participants

All teachers and paraprofessionals participating in the PLC were invited to take part in the face-to-face interviews at a juvenile correctional facility. The invitations included a narrative explaining the purpose of the research and a statement that the participants can choose to participate or not, and if they do, they can still stop at any time. A letter of consent was given to each participant that their participation was voluntary, can stop at any time, minimal risks involved, and potential benefits of the research for the participants and the school. Participants reviewed findings in a faculty meeting. Protected confidentiality was administered for both the school and participants. I gained permission to archive the data, keep information confidential, restrict access, and re-contact participants if needed for clarification. Data will remain safe and securely stored for 5 years and destroyed after that.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to examine patterns of similarities and differences among teachers after implementing and utilizing a PLC in a correctional facility school. I focused on the reflections from the participants in interviews, previous PLCs' meetings, and previous records of professional development. I used qualitative data and analysis.

Teachers in the juvenile correctional facility were invited to participate voluntarily in the study. I have established a working relationship with participants while developing and implementing the PLC. Participants were ensured of their rights, confidentiality, and sign informed consent forms to participate.

In this research study, all participants were heard. If there was a discrepancy, I asked the participant to review the information for clarity.

Summary

I used a qualitative case study methodology to understand the perceptions of teachers and paraprofessionals after implementing the PLC. Reviewing previous documents and face-to-face interviews allowed me to understand the perceptions of teachers and paraprofessionals after implementing the PLC. Using more than one source to obtain information also granted me the opportunity to triangulate the sources. For this study, I followed an inductive analysis to develop themes or categories. Chapter 4 describes the findings based on data collection and analysis.

Chapter 4: The Results

Introduction

After Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) had granted approval, a faculty meeting was held at the juvenile correctional facility to ask teachers and paraprofessionals to become a part of this study. I shared an overview of the proposed study with the teachers and paraprofessionals. Invitations and consent forms were read and issued to everyone. As mentioned, volunteering was confidential. Therefore, teachers and paraprofessionals were asked to send an e-mail, text, telephone, write a note, or simply notify me through personal contact to volunteer as a study participant.

Of the six teachers and five paraprofessionals at the juvenile correctional facility school, four teachers and three paraprofessionals volunteered to be a part of this study. Participants named the location to be interviewed to avoid missing instructional time during school hours. Locations for the interviews included the public library, restaurants, and a participant's home. For each location, participants were able to concentrate and give their personal answers to the pre-identified interview questions to answer the guiding question: The teachers and paraprofessionals of diverse experience and training described their participation in the PLC at a juvenile correctional facility school setting.

Phases of Data Collection.

This qualitative study used two phases of data collection. The first phase was reviewing documents of previous PLC meeting agendas from the previous 5 years from

2015. The second phase was structured face-to-face interviews of teachers and paraprofessionals working at the juvenile correctional facility.

Professional Learning Communities Development and Meetings

The first phase of data collection was reviewing previous PLC meeting agendas. Categories obtained from the information gathered from the documents were time allotments, actions taken, events, issues, and benefits of the meetings. For the past five years, one faculty meeting was held two times per month during lunch period. On occasions, meetings were held after school hours. After reviewing the agendas for 2011/2012 academic school year, the agendas referred to teacher preparedness-lesson planning, classroom management, classroom organizations, Professional Development 360, classroom observations, school-wide and classroom procedures, behavior management, testing procedures, and technology development.

After implementing the PLC 3 year's prior, the agenda referred to student data and achievement. Information on the agendas shifted from strategies to help the teachers to the specific needs of the students. For example, one agenda specifically stated that the PLC work was to develop a workable educational plan for a student (PLC notes September 7, 2012). Data from multiple sources (class work, standardized test, criterion referenced test, and report card grades) were presented to view students' present and past work. The team worked together to design an individualized educational plan to improve a student's achievement. An integrated criterion-referenced assessment that included English Language Arts and mathematics skills was administered to the student for base-line data. Deficits and strengths were noted to understand the areas in which the student

needed strengthening. After three weeks of using modifications and strategies suggested by the PLC, a posttest was administered to determine the effectiveness of the plan. According to the evaluation, the student's pretest score was 45 out of 100 and posttest 67 out of 100. Therefore, the educational plan did show student improvement.

Time allotment for the PLC was not seen as a problem at this facility. Each teacher had a planning period at the same time. Following planning, each teacher had a lunch break. During the planning period once per week, the PLC meetings were held at the facility. The lead teacher decided to designate every Wednesday during teacher planning for the PLC meetings (PLC meeting August 8, 2012). To add more interest, each member designated a date to bring in a dessert during the meeting. Therefore, time for meetings was not seen as an issue for the teachers at this school.

The focus of the PLC was student-centered. An example of actions taken was when a teacher had a problem and asked for help (PLC meeting October 16, 2013). An educational plan was designed for this particular student to promote learning success. The professionals collaborated on individualized academic skills for the student. Questions addressed were what this student needed to learn, how the teacher would know the student learned the skill, what teachers needed to do when the student did not learn the skill, and what teachers could do when the student had already acquired the skill. The plan for this individual consisted of activities, strategies, modifications, and accommodations in all subject areas to improve his weakness in academics. Additionally, assessments and evaluation criteria were used to determine and document student involvement, participation, and growth.

The agendas consisted of all actions taken at each meeting. For instance, one student had an academic deficit in mathematics (PLC meeting November 19, 2014). After reviewing previous documents and other data sources, the PLC came up with a plan for the student to experience success in mathematics. That student experienced success in mathematics according to pre- and posttesting (PLC meeting March 3, 2015; PLC meeting March 24, 2015).

According to the documents reviewed, after the implementation of the in-house PLC, teachers began to focus more on data about student needs and achievement in order to work more effectively with the students. For example, every month a Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) was administered to each of the students enrolled at the facility. As this facility enrolls and releases students throughout the month, students are administered the test upon admission, and this test is one of the data sources used at the facility. During the PLC, teachers worked together to determine the students' strengths and the areas in need of strengthening. Teachers worked on various skills across the curriculum. For instance, teachers integrated English with math, science, social studies, and careers to improve academic deficit areas. The month following the TABE, teachers focused on the improvement of the students and discussed other means or strategies to help students overcome their deficits (PLC meeting February 12, 2014). Most of all, the attention was on what works and what did not work.

In the past, benefits and needs of students at a juvenile correctional facility school were not discussed (PLC meeting September 7, 2011). According to the documented meeting, a teacher gathered a portfolio of a student by collecting the student's work from

four content area teachers. The PLC reviewed all of the assignments, classwork, and quizzes to address the needs of this student. Individualized accommodations, modifications, and strategies were discussed to help the student overcome the academic deficits. Documents revealed that the PLC provided quality time for teachers and paraprofessionals to collaborate and share. Professionals provided the data-driven accommodations and strategies to fit the student within the facility with the focus on the students and their learning (PLC meeting September 17, 2014).

Five themes emerged from the inductive analysis process: (a) professional learning growth and benefits, (b) teacher learning and practice, (c) attitude adjustment and culture, (d) collaboration and sharing, and (e) active engagement of paraprofessionals in the PLC.

Theme 1: Professional Learning Growth and Benefits

Teachers described PLCs as being beneficial and valuable. As noted in the responses of the educators, PLCs provided the opportunity to grow professionally. Teachers worked to promote learning and improve student achievement for positive social change through professional collaboration. Teachers reported that they were working and learning together professionally in an environment that was beneficial and geared to their precise working environment (PLC meeting February 16, 2015). T102 stated, I enjoy the fact that the teachers are working members of this community to share their teaching experiences, and everyone is accountable for actions taken." T103 concurred, stating, "As a team, we look at previous samples of student work,

standardized test, a teacher made, report cards, and other information to make workable plans to help students to achieve."

Teachers reported that the PLC meetings have improved their teaching and learning. In this PLC, the group was engaged in endeavors aimed at helping students make progress. They were actively listening and reflecting to help provide each other with different strategies to increase the learning opportunities for students (PLC meeting October 17, 2015). Reflective feedback allowed teachers and paraprofessionals to grow professionally:

> PLCs have contributed to my professional growth in many ways. I am a part of a learning team that focuses on teacher learning and student achievement. I have learned to use my past professional development information to improve student achievement. I have gained professional understanding from other professionals. I am no longer isolated. I keep up with current literature. Most of all, I have gained the understanding of using student data to improve my learning and promote higher student achievement. (T104)

Teamwork, collaboration, and sharing have contributed to professional growth. Furthermore, teachers and paraprofessionals no longer worked in isolation (PLC meeting August 15, 2012). Professionals were working together in this community to share their experiences. Data were used to make decisions and recommendations. "We study the students' learning from different data sources-standardized test, the teacher made test, cumulative records and more to find out how we can help this student to achieve" (T101).

As noted, participants were eager to express that the PLC had improved their learning and growth. However, two of the four teachers interviewed were veteran teachers who willingly expressed their expertise to help inexperienced teachers. Responses from teachers included presenting and utilizing strategies, accommodations, techniques, and recommendations that had worked in the past to help teachers learn about the academic needs of students in a juvenile correctional facility. Two teachers indicated that PLCs had improved their learning through descriptively planning individualized educational procedures and recommendations to promote academic growth and achievement:

> I work with experienced teachers who can back up their findings and recommendations with best practices. As a team, we have built a book of strategies used with examples and outcomes designed for this facility. Teachers and professionals engaged themselves in learning and improved student achievement. Most of all, I love the ideal of continuing to do research to gain valuable and reliable information to improve teacher learning and student achievement in the PLC at this facility. (T102)

However, the responses of two less experienced teachers focused on gaining an understanding of working with students with diverse needs. All subject areas used the integrated curriculum, and the team worked together to focus on learning targets. Activities were designed to address challenges identified by the PLCs: “After working in this PLC, I have experienced positive outcomes for learning activities appropriate to address the needs of the students to promote student achievement” (T103).

PLCs contributed to professionals working together in teams to help these juveniles understand their work and make adjustments to improve their education. Both teachers and paraprofessionals indicated that in-house attention was needed to address the challenges of this facility. Furthermore, three of the four teachers indicated that the PLCs granted opportunities for paraprofessionals to be included to address their concerns as well.

During a PLC meeting in 2014, the instructional staff identified strengths and benefits of the PLC at this juvenile correctional facility school. The strengths and benefits included best practice instructional strategies, data driven activities from assessments, veteran teachers' recommendations, collaboration among peers, and sharing. Teachers gave various descriptions of their PLC. Some teachers were willing to use the PLC to guide their expertise in successfully providing the students with their identified needs. The other veteran teacher (T101) needed more time to collaborate with other professionals, but did state that the PLC experience was very positive, and admitted that some of the effective strategies discussed were used to help her improve her instructions. On the other hand, one veteran teacher (T102) was apprehensive about PLC due to the inability to accept change. The teachers implied that the original teaching method of teaching the same things the same ways were not effective. Accordingly, teachers indicated that they learned to utilize PLC to identify areas in need of strengthening to improve student learning. They specifically stated that they shared responsibilities through teamwork. Therefore, teachers indicated that the PLC addressed the challenges needed to improve the students.

The paraprofessionals also indicated that they have experienced growth after being part of the PLC in the juvenile correctional facility:

> I am part of a team to help students grow in a juvenile correctional facility. The lead teacher decided to include the paraprofessionals in the PLC. Now that I have been with this group of educators, I know that I am an extension of the teacher to give special attention to lower achieving students and help the teacher to monitor and assist students from the beginning to the end of the classes (P101)

Theme 2: Teacher Learning and Practice

Teachers conveyed that the PLCs have developed an environment to learn and practice. Similarly, three of the four teachers acknowledged that keeping abreast of current literature, talking about current issues in education, and collaborating with other professionals had improved learning and increased student achievement. However, one of the four teachers (T103) interviewed indicated a variation. The teacher replied that too much work was initiated to help some of the students, and only a small portion of the students grew academically. However, this teacher also noted some overall improvement of the students, and indicated much development as an educator. Therefore, all of the teachers acknowledged that they had experienced growth. Teachers also implied that research and collaboration helped to provide the students with what they needed.

This study identified various perceptions and beliefs as participants recounted their learning experiences that led to improved student achievement. Of the four teachers, two (T101 & T104) perceived collaborating as the key to learning as the PLCs critically reflected to understand the challenges set before them. The other two teachers (T102 &

103) perceived research along with collaboration developed their instructions and strategies. The significant finding was that all of the teachers perceived and recognized collaboration in PLCs to improve their teaching method and strategies. Teachers implied that they were able to work together to develop plans to help students to achieve and improve their learning: "After working in the PLC, I am more attentive to students' work. I have some strategies and accommodations I can assist students with" (T102). T103 agreed. "I was one of the teachers that did not know what to expect. After introducing and implementing PLC, I know that I have grown in education."

According to the interviews, participants in the PLC have changed their perspectives and attitudes about this juvenile correctional facility and students. With the PLC in place, participants indicated that students improved and teachers' attitudes of working with students in a juvenile correctional facility improved. Teachers implied that the involvement in the PLC improved their competence in the process of teaching at a correctional facility school that yielded to improved teacher performance. Teachers indicated that the PLC have brought about a change so much that teachers have shown noted improvement in students' performance to receive incentive pay. "Even though the incentive pay was not a lot, I am grateful to know that our work and dedication in PLC has generated growth" (T102). Furthermore,

> I have heard teachers from other schools talk about incentive pay received when students have experienced improved academic performance. I know that PLCs have allowed all of the teachers at this juvenile correctional facility school receive

> high performance professionally. Teachers received incentive pay after PLCs were implemented. (T104).

Furthermore, teachers indicated that learning took place that generated improved teacher performance in the PLC. Interestingly, veteran teachers and paraprofessionals mentioned the before and after effects of the PLC:

> Before PLCs, teachers were isolated, but now, I am not on my own. The community is held accountable for student outcome. I am a part of a team that continually reflects upon instructional practices and benchmarks. The team monitors the outcome to ensure success (T101).

The PLC provided teachers the opportunity to share goals and ideas. Professionals critically examined students' work and designed plans to improve in academics. Data from 2013/14 professional growth plans showed higher performance in student achievement at this juvenile correctional facility.

Teachers reported that the students at this juvenile correctional facility work at various academic levels and have various academic needs. Additionally, the students are not placed in classrooms according to their grade levels. The juvenile correctional facility school students were assigned to classes according to the severity of the crime or crimes committed. Therefore, teachers have to modify instructions and strategies to accommodate all students. Statewide-standardized scores were improved within a three-year period from 22 percent to 26 percent in social studies, 15 percent to 18 percent in science, 14 percent to 26 percent in mathematics and 14 percent to 32 percent in English Language Arts (PLC notes May 29, 2014). Furthermore, the previous standardized test

indicated that the scores had increased every year after utilizing PLC. Teachers acknowledged that PLC have promoted continuous improvements of the education department at this correctional facility school. Teachers acknowledged that the teachers are working together to benefit the students have shown recognizable improvements in a standardized test:

> I can remember when I first started teaching at this facility; we did not have any students to pass the standardized test administered at the end of the school year. All of the students needed remediating. After working in professional learning communities, the numbers are going up every year (T102).

The instructional staff described their learning and practice after implementing the PLC (PLC meeting May 22, 2013). Teachers are using strategies and accommodations to better prepare the students. For example, a sixth grade student had failing grades in mathematics. A curriculum-based assessment was administered. This student did not know his multiplication facts. A fact sheet was given to the student to use. This student became very successful in mathematics. Later, the student decided to learn his multiplication facts to illuminate using the multiplication fact sheet. Participants indicated that teachers acquired knowledge of using prior assessments to devise data-driven plans prescriptively to improve students' performance after implementing PLCs.

In summary, teacher learning and practice involved collaboration and sharing among peers. Teachers worked together to benefit the students. The PLC provided an in-house tool to provide continuous learning among educators. This ongoing learning was found to be what the teachers needed and wished for to provide the best education for

juvenile correctional facility students who were placed in classes with various grade and ability levels.

The teachers discussed teacher learning and practice only. Therefore, paraprofessionals did not make any comments related to this theme.

Theme 3: Attitude Adjustment of the Culture

After using the teaching guidelines used in regular schools, teachers indicated that a large number of the students were not experiencing success. Participants acknowledged that their teaching attitudes had changed to being positive, cooperative, dependable, and versatile at a juvenile correctional facility school. Teachers had to develop strategies, accommodations, and techniques to support these students at this juvenile correctional facility (PLC meeting notes; PLC meeting August 23, 2013; T104): "The PLCs have changed my attitude about the students at this facility. I love my job and the student I work with" (T102).

Participation in PLC has made a difference in professionals' attitude toward the facility, teachers and students. Teachers and paraprofessionals indicated the engagement of learning new and used techniques, strategies, and accommodations for the students to become successful:

> I know that we work hard and are cognizant of making the best decisions to help students achieve. Therefore, my perspective and attitude for this facility have changed. I work to provide the necessary tools and skills to give all students the opportunity to learn and learn well. We have more time to focus on student learning and growth in our PLC (T104).

As indicated, time and work had to be in place for teachers to collaborate after looking at students' present and past performance, standardized and criterion-referenced tests, and more to write individualized plans to benefit students. Some disagreements were initiated and later recognized, discussed and solved:

> Over time, we have looked at problematic areas, planned, reflected, assessed, revised and more to improve student achievement and increase teacher learning. At this point in my career, I feel that I am ready for the role to help others build a PLC (T101). "The instructional staff expressed that this PLC had improved their attitudes and perspectives at this correctional facility school" (PLC meeting April 15, 2015).

During a PLC meeting, certificated teachers discussed the before and after effects of PLCs. Before the PLC, teachers indicated that some of the previous activities worked, but many did not. They expressed frustration with strategies used in the traditional school setting that were not appropriate to address the needs of the juvenile correctional facility students. After the PLC implementation, teachers acknowledged that the entire community worked together to develop individualized strategies and accommodations explicitly designed to meet students' needs. Therefore, the collaboration and sharing within the team to promote higher student achievement produced positive relationships. The professionals expressed that they have developed a positive attitude in this environment after working in the PLC.

The paraprofessionals also indicated that the PLC changed their attitude about working in a juvenile correctional facility. Paraprofessionals were eager to work with

students individually or in small groups to provide the extra attention the under achieving students needed. After observing the growth the students made due to the strategies designed by the PLC, the paraprofessionals acknowledged that the improvement changed their views:

> Seeing the students raising their hands and answering questions in the classroom was very rewarding (P102). The underachieving students I worked with were more engaged in the classwork and therefore improved in his score from 60 percent to 90 percent in only two weeks (Pl03). I can see that my work with the students has made a drastic change in their attitude toward education (P101)

In summary, both the teachers and paraprofessionals acknowledged that the PLC changed their attitudes about education to being positive, cooperative, dependable, and versatile. The PLC provide time for teachers and paraprofessionals to work together to establish professional relationships. The instructional staff members were engaged to meet the documented challenges by improving teacher learning to increase student achievement.

Theme 4: Collaboration and Sharing

Participants indicated that allotted time had been set-aside for teachers and paraprofessionals to focus on data-driven activities to plan to improve students' weaknesses while building on their strengths. In the PLC, the teachers described activities explicitly to improve teacher learning individually and collectively (PLC meeting August 13, 2014 & August 20, 2015). Teachers collaborated and shared information on meaningful data collection. Veteran teachers discussed the use of information, and ways

to determine students' strengths and areas in need of strengthening: "The data obtained from previous standardized test and school records provide pertinent information to determine grade level abilities as well as areas in need of strengthening." (T101)

However, participants admitted that professional relationships are developed over time from ongoing collaboration and sharing to develop individualized educational plans that yield higher student achievement. From the four teachers interviewed, one newly hired and one veteran teacher were reluctant in collaboration and sharing. Participants indicated that the benefits of PLCs had to be recognized before being actively involved in the meetings. The participants were nonresponsive and passive about PLC at the beginning. On the other hand, the other veteran and newly hired teacher were very responsive and active in collaboration and sharing (PLC notes September 7, 2012). After the nonresponsive and passive teachers observed the responsive and active teachers working to solve the academic problems they encountered, the other teachers finally accepted PLCs as a tool to benefit their teaching strategies and instructions. Later, all the teachers indicated that the team worked together to determine strengths and areas in need of strengthening through data collection through collaboration and sharing with other professionals. Teachers also mentioned that collaboration took place when the team provided intense reflections on suggested instructional strategies, monitored outcomes for success, provided continuous learning opportunities, and examined what worked and did not work critically. Overall, the participants mentioned that this PLC has developed professional relationships to design workable plans effectively to improve students' achievement and promote teachers' effectiveness.

Nevertheless, hard work, determination, and dedication played an important role to make this PLC beneficial. The lead teacher mentioned a different perception from an administrator's point of view (PLC meeting May 24, 2014). He mentioned professional attitudes existed with meaningful goals set by the faculty. The newly hired teachers were willing to work in the PLC to help improve students' performance. However, some veteran teachers tried to resist change. The teachers wanted to teach the same things the same ways without change: "Some veteran teachers like to teach the same way throughout their career. Just like medicine and other professions, teachers need to keep up with best practice." (T102)

One teacher stated, "We as educators have to keep up with the new trends to prepare students to meet the new challenges in existence today." The paraprofessionals admitted that the collaboration and sharing were beneficial in the PLC at this juvenile correctional facility. Both teachers and paraprofessionals acknowledged that listening to teachers brainstorm, reflect, discuss, and recommend instructional strategies to help the students achieve are rewarding (PLC meeting August 15, 2013).

After implementing the PLC, teachers worked collaboratively as a team with a shared goal of raising student achievement. Paraprofessionals acknowledged that the collaboration and sharing provided them with a clearer understanding of how teachers provide individualized plans to enable all students to achieve.

Theme 5: Active Engagement of Paraprofessionals in Professional Learning Communities

At the juvenile correctional facility school, one teacher and one paraprofessional were assigned to each class. The lead teacher and other teachers decided to allow paraprofessionals to become part of PLC to include the entire education department (PLC notes September 7, 2012). However, paraprofessionals had different roles and perceptions from teachers. Their role consisted of the following: assisting the teacher with students' guidance in activities, working with some assigned students according to their IEPs, following accommodations and modifications according to their assigned teacher, and monitoring all students to give that extra help during class time (PLC notes September 15, 2012). Besides, all of the paraprofessionals had gone through paraprofessional training through the school system to give details about their job descriptions and duties adequately. Therefore, paraprofessionals indicated that they had different roles from the teachers at this facility. According to documents and face-to-face interviews, paraprofessionals were granted the opportunity to become active and participating members of the PLC at the correctional facility school. In the beginning, paraprofessionals indicated that they were listeners and nonresponsive. They also mentioned that being a part of the PLC enabled them to understand educational terminologies and job responsibilities. Furthermore, the paraprofessionals indicated that they were very engaged in the PLC.

At this juvenile correctional facility school, their responsibilities were different. Two of the three veteran paraprofessionals were hired as special education

paraprofessionals in a regular school. The newly hired paraprofessional was hired at this facility. The veteran paraprofessionals indicated that they worked with severe profound students to work on functional needs for over 12 years. The newly hired paraprofessional had not worked at a school setting in the past. However, she did past the test, Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), to make her a highly qualified paraprofessional. Assisting students in a regular education classroom was very new to these paraprofessionals. Even though paraprofessionals had gone through all of the required training, that training did not prepare them to work in a correctional facility school with students with various academic deficits. Therefore, the paraprofessionals indicated that they were eager to become part of the PLC to understand fully what was required of them at the correctional facility school.

In order for the PLC to be successful at the correctional facility, all educational staff needed to participate actively (PLC meeting September 12, 2015). Paraprofessionals were hesitant to become active participants in the PLC. However, the newly hired paraprofessional indicated that she was the first to share in the collaboration meetings while the other veteran paraprofessionals were listeners and sat back during the PLC. Their input and reflections were heard as well:

> I have been working with students for over twelve years and did not really understand my job description. I have to say that paraprofessionals were not a part of teachers' meetings at the other schools I was assigned. Since I started working with other paraprofessionals and certified teachers in a PLC, I have a better

> understanding of what is expected of me and how I should work with the students (P102).

Therefore, paraprofessionals were able to voice their views and experiences after becoming a part of the PLC:

> All I did was assist the teacher and wait for directives. Within the team, I have learned to communicate with other professionals to benefit the students as well as myself. Now, I work directly from the plan to help improve their learning by giving them that extra attention for the students to experience success (P101).
>
> I am now able to express my concerns and give recommendations like a professional. I have learned how to work with others to get a job done. Most of all, I have learned to listen (P102).

However, one of the latest hired paraprofessionals (P103) had a different perception. This paraprofessional was not aware that PLC did not exist at the correctional school 6 years earlier. As noted, she did not experience the challenges of planning, implementing and utilizing the PLC like the veteran paraprofessionals. Therefore, she indicated that she initially became a part of the well-developed and data-driven PLC in a correctional facility and enjoyed collaborating and sharing to help students achieve:

> I was unaware of the challenges that existed before I was hired. All I know is that I have learned to research professional journals with the teachers to find strategies to help improve the effectiveness of teacher to lead to students learning. I have learned so much that I decided to go back to school to complete my college

courses to receive my teaching certificate. After becoming an active member of the PLC, I am very motivated with learning and student achievement (P101).

Even though the paraprofessionals were indecisive and reluctant to actively participate in PLC at the beginning, it did not take them long to understand the benefit of including everyone in the education department. The school had a goal to obtain. Everyone needed to be involved to accomplish the goal for all educators at the correctional facility school. "The paraprofessionals expressed concern and well being of the students: Even though they convicted of a crime, they too need to become more knowledgeable to grow positively and respectfully to become a productive citizen." (P103)

Paraprofessionals indicated that they no longer felt left out or isolated. After being a part of PLC, paraprofessionals acknowledged that they had learned some educational terms that they were not familiar with. For instance, curriculum based assessment, criterion referenced testing, CCSS, data driven recommendations and decisions, and more are some terms paraprofessionals learned. Therefore, paraprofessionals at this juvenile correctional facility acknowledged that PLCs have been a tool for them to understand better the duties of paraprofessionals as well as teachers.

Summary of the Findings

Teachers and paraprofessionals described and acknowledged how collaborating and sharing were beneficial in their PLC. The academic problems were shared and managed by the entire education department while working in the professional learning community. For example, teachers no longer worked in isolation. The entire team took

the responsibilities for students' learning, teachers' developed plans to help underachieving students as well as advanced students, and all decisions made were data-driven. Although collaboration and sharing professionally did not come naturally, both teachers and paraprofessionals indicated that sharing and collaboration in the PLC have been beneficial because they have been engaged in discussing, planning, revising and evaluating student progress for improvement and higher achievement.

In Chapter 5, I will discuss the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, implications and conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

Introduction

This research-guiding question concerned teachers and paraprofessionals working in PLCs in a juvenile correctional facility school. The PLC was implemented in this juvenile correctional facility school after two teachers and three paraprofessionals were administratively placed to meet provisions of a desegregation suit filed over 45 years ago. Teachers were placed in this restrictive environment without any preparation for teaching incarcerated students, and some of the teachers were assigned to teach classes they were not certified to teach. Therefore, teachers needed to gain the understanding of the juvenile correctional facility and at-risk incarcerated students they were going to teach.

At this juvenile correctional facility, the facility staff handled the management of student behavior rather than teachers or paraprofessionals. Two to four facility staff or guards were placed in each classroom at all times. A facility staff member provided in-service training for teachers and paraprofessionals at the beginning of each school year about the policies and procedures to follow (August 14, 2012; August 13, 2013; August 5, 2014; August 4, 2015). The meeting provided details about the run of the facility. Directives were given to the entire education faculty. For example, some directives indicated that the educators were to: teach only, that behavior was not a concern for the education department. If a physical confrontation were to occur, teachers were instructed to move to the side upon request. After the information meeting, the educational staff signed the in-service roster that specifically stated the facility staff would handle any

inappropriate or disruptive behaviors exhibited by the students. To conclude, the educators are not responsible for classroom management, procedures, and organization at this facility.

As the students were diverse culturally and in academic ability, teachers were compelled to change their instructional style to reach the students in this confined environment. This chapter of the study provides an interpretation of the findings in relationship to the research guiding question and the conceptual framework. Also, variations, similarities, and differences are described with regard to school culture and the roles of teachers and paraprofessionals.

Interpretation of Findings

The conceptual framework for this study was derived from the constructivist theory that supports teams actively working together socially to develop knowledge (Van Lare & Brazer, 2013). Teachers and paraprofessionals stated that active engagement in PLCs was a primary reason for improved teacher knowledge and the promotion of student achievement. The study also mentioned that positive social relationships developed in PLCs. The educators interacted socially to discuss instructional methods and strategies through reflection and feedback.

In the PLCs, the teachers and paraprofessionals were also engaged in the active learning of concepts and approaches to develop individualized educational plans. Constructivist teachers develop meaning based on their interactions, ideas, beliefs, and prior knowledge (Martell, 2014). Participants acknowledged that they did construct meaning through collaboration and sharing in PLCs. Constructivist teachers are active

rather than passive (Gash, 2014). After utilizing the PLC, teachers started working together to include CCSS and teaching strategies to improve student achievement. Teachers felt that social interactions between peers were meaningful and crucial to address effective instructional strategies for the incarcerated students. Furthermore, data from student work were used to improve academic achievement. Educators were actively engaged in their immediate environment while creatively developing solutions for academic achievement problems collectively.

Culture of the School

The culture of this juvenile correctional facility school was much different from a typical school. For the last five years, the classroom size ranged from as low as two to as many as 22 students. Each classroom was sex segregated with five classes of males and one of females. Students were between the ages of 10 and 19, and all were court mandated to attend this school as a consequence of crimes committed. A teacher, paraprofessional, and two to four guards were assigned in a classroom at all times. Additionally, the special education teacher was assigned to mathematics and English classes two days per week. Guards walked students to and from classrooms. The switchboard operator informed the staff by walkie-talkie when to leave one classroom to go to another so that student groups would not meet in the hallways. The above actions were enforced to avoid threats of violence (Parkinson & Steurer, 2004). These limitations created a safe and orderly environment for the facility, students, and educational staff.

The guards maintained security while teachers were responsible for educating the students and paraprofessionals provided assistance. Atypical of traditional school

contexts, educators were restricted from intervening in any appropriate or inappropriate behaviors, grouping students, or assigning seats to students. Guards or other facility staff controlled seating arrangements, told students when to speak, gave corrective feedback, and arranged the classrooms. Furthermore, the guards had to undergo and pass various activities and training to prove to be physically capable for this job. Therefore, the facility staff was composed of physically competent and trained individuals hired to provide a safe environment for the incarcerated students, educators, and disciplinarians who may enter the facility (PLC notes August 5, 2012).

The participants did not mention the smaller classes during the interviews perhaps because the class size was not an issue. The small classes allowed the teachers to individualize instructions more than was possible at regular schools. Furthermore, many students in the juvenile correctional facility school were presented with a disability. Attention to documented background of students was acquired to provide accommodations and strategies to help students. The areas that needed strengthening were discussed upon the student's admission in order to adhere to the IEP as well as to provide the best education possible at the juvenile correctional facility. The small population of students gave teachers the opportunity to develop individualized plans for all students.

At most schools, teachers are responsible for students' behaviors and rewarding appropriate behaviors intrinsically or extrinsically and preventing negative or inappropriate behaviors (Hodge, 2014). Furthermore, in traditional school PLCs, teachers discuss rewarding procedures for students who are actively participating in educational

activities (Williams, 2013). At the juvenile correctional facility school, however, teachers and paraprofessionals reported that facility administrators instructed educational staff to step aside for the facility staff to handle inappropriate behaviors. Teachers and paraprofessionals explained that the only rewards students could receive from them were juvenile correctional facility coupons that the students could use to purchase snacks from the facility store. Therefore, unlike other schools, behavioral concerns did not affect the PLCs at this unique study school because the facility staff handled all behavioral concerns (Hodge, 2014; Williams, 2013).

Role of the Teachers

The role of the teachers was also different at this correctional facility school. Teachers collaborated in the PLC with other professionals to make individualized decisions to help students achieve academically. In other schools, teachers were responsible for classroom management, behavior management and rules for hall, classroom and campus. This social concept of collaborating in PLC was used in this school to support job-embedded professional learning for instructional improvement. Teachers further engaged in the constructivist model through making notations of concerns, learning about change, and improving their teaching profession with trusted colleagues (Bowers et al., 2014). In their PLCs, time allotments, actions taken, events, issues and benefits of the meetings were discussed. As noted in other PLCs, time is a challenge for educators to build PLCs to establish professional relationships to improve learning (Stewart, 2014; Lujan & Day, 2010; Yamraj, 2008). However, time allotments were not a problem at this facility school since all educational staff had their planning

period at the same time. Therefore, every Wednesday, during planning period, was set aside for PLC meetings to collaborate on job-embedded activities to improve educational effectiveness. Similarly, other researchers suggested allotted time to work together in PLC (Bowers et al., 2014; Lujan & Day, 2010; Stewart, 2014; Yamraj, 2008; Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2014). Therefore, teachers used the allotted time to collaborate on the challenges set before them to improve student achievement. Teaching strategies changed to meet the needs of the students. The changes noted that students became more engaged in their academic work that promoted higher participation and noted achievement.

The education staff utilized their PLC for collaboration and sharing (DuFour, 2014). In PLCs, teachers use time efficiently to design and manage their learning activities, determine and apply evaluation skills and negotiate socially by collaboration and sharing (Lewis, 2010). In addition, teachers indicated that they have learned to use their time wisely in the PLC to adequately discuss, plan, revise, and evaluate to make decisions through collaboration and sharing.

The PLC granted juvenile correctional facility teachers the opportunity to change from teacher-centered to student-centered activities. In PLCs, educators focused on the higher achievement of students (DuFour, 2014). Therefore, professionals indicated that they worked together to promote achievement and replace patterns of failure with patterns of success in a juvenile correctional facility school. Furthermore, educators worked to involve students to facilitate needed skills consistent with the needs of the juvenile population.

As mentioned by the teachers, the PLC provided a relevant approach to understand the restricted environment utilized in the juvenile correctional facility school. Teachers indicated that their ability to think and discuss professionally has changed their careers drastically. Data were used to provide evidence of the problems before and after suggested strategies were recommended and utilized. In PLCs, teachers thought about the obstacles to remove them and focused on what they had gained (DuFour, 2015). After the PLC, barriers were eliminated, and professional relationships were built with other educators to improve teaching performance. Teachers were engaged in constructivist learning while developing individualized educational plans, effective teaching strategies, and professional relationships. Furthermore, the restricted environment did not limit the teachers after utilizing the PLC.

Teachers read many articles PLC articles before actually implementing a PLC at this juvenile correctional facility (PLC meeting October 8, 2010). Teachers used the questions by DuFour (2008) to identify needed understanding and DuFour & Mattos (2013) to identify areas in need of strengthening. The agreed upon questions to be asked were: (a) what do students need to know, (b) how will teachers know student had learned the skill, (c) what will teachers do when students did not learn the skill, and (d) what will teachers do when students already know the skills (DuFour, 2008). Teachers acknowledged that each plan consisted of activities, strategies, modifications and accommodations integrated all subject areas to improve academics strengths and weaknesses. The participants mentioned that the PLC provided quality time for

professionals to work together to improve their performance and increase student achievement.

In the PLC, there were variations in the teachers' participation, attitude, and collaboration. Previous studies have indicated that some teachers are not as willing to share and collaborate with others in a PLC (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). At the juvenile correctional facility, two of the experienced teachers were willing to start collaborating and bringing attention to students' concerns. The inexperienced teachers were more passive and less responsive at the beginning. After being a part of this community of educators, the inexperienced teachers began to collaborate more and discussed topics of her concern. Professionals reported that they were working in professional teams in their immediate environment focused on student-centered activities, accommodations, recommendations and strategies to improve their learning and promote student achievement. The participants further explained that teachers had developed the understanding of using student data to provide data-driven activities to prepare students from collaboration and sharing. As a result, the experienced teachers provided the foundation for the less experienced teachers to understand PLCs by contributing and sharing.

All of the teachers mentioned that their experience in the PLC improved their instructional strategies and methods that led to notable professional growth. Participants mentioned that the PLC promoted improved ongoing professional development opportunities. Three of the four teachers acknowledged that keeping abreast of current literature, talking about current trends and issues in education, and collaborating with

other professionals improved their understanding that led to increased student achievement. Participants also mentioned that after implementing the PLC, they were no longer working in isolation. In PLCs, the entire community became accountable for student outcomes (DuFour, 2014). The significant finding was that teachers did improve from each other after working together to develop plans to help students to achieve and improve their performance.

Throughout the study, teachers mentioned that they have learned to love their job and work with the students at this juvenile correctional facility school. When teachers work together, give input and apply their knowledge, positive attitudes rise (Steiner, 2014). Because of this experience, teachers and paraprofessionals shared that all staff were respected, heard and given attention to problems and worked together to solve problems that exist. The positive attitudes have helped professionals to succeed on projects, enjoy their job and responsibilities, meet goals and work collaboratively with others. Teachers may want to make changes if they see the benefits and opportunities to apply their knowledge about teaching (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Therefore, the professional relationship between the teachers allowed the team members to work together to apply their expertise.

Teachers mentioned that the PLC provided an opportunity for team members to work together to assist professionals to collaborate on issues, develop plans and apply authentic roles to develop multiple strategies and method to include all students while presenting planned effective instructions. Similar to Ruey (2010) teachers also mentioned that their PLC allowed team members the opportunity to discuss issues, provide feedback

and set achievable goals. In the PLC, teachers used a variety of techniques and strategies mentioned in other research to address the needs of students – graphic organizers, story starters, charts, diagrams, hands-on techniques, technology devices and equipment and other manipulative (Williams, 2013). In the PLC, teachers and paraprofessionals indicated that they continued to seek to find the individualized approaches and techniques to improve student achievement and promote teacher growth. The result included all team members being responsible for effective teaching strategies and improved student achievement.

Teachers also mentioned some changes the PLC made on their educational growth. Written strategies, accommodations, techniques, best practice research along with data-driven activities are now available to teachers to use in other cases that may arrive at this juvenile correctional facility school. Because of the turnaround of the students at this juvenile correctional facility, teachers admitted that ongoing PLC were needed to collaborate and share ongoing problems as they arise. Therefore, the changes led to career long opportunities to consist of effective teaching strategies to benefit the incarcerated students.

Teachers mentioned the benefits of the PLC in their immediate workplace. The appreciation for the PLC meant more to younger or newly hired teachers than the veteran or incumbent teachers and paraprofessionals. These findings reiterate the findings of current research that traditional teaching and instructional methods are hard for some educational staff to give up (Moore & Hicks, 2014; Ruey, 2010; Weimer, 2012). The PLC acquired the opportunity to have input about their learning. In the past, professional

development meetings covered information that did not deal with the conditions and students at a juvenile correctional facility school. Administrators and principals determined what teachers needed to know in the professional meetings. Therefore, collaboration and sharing with other professionals in PLCs promoted an environment for ongoing improvements for teachers to grow professionally (DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

Role of Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals are not a part of most PLCs (DuFour, 2014) because they are hired to support the teacher in the classroom by assisting students with various exceptionalities. Teachers supervise paraprofessionals who provide instructional support in the classroom. In this facility, paraprofessionals were actively involved and supported in the PLC. Educators worked together to include the entire educational staff to stay abreast of the goals and objectives for students to receive an education comparable with other youth, consistent with the Common Core Curriculum and offer the appropriate needs of the juvenile population. However, when adults are trained and supervised in supported job-embedded activities, paraprofessionals begin to respond positively to change, show improved attitude and engaged informally in planning, doing and reflection (Sauberan, 2015). After paraprofessionals were invited to become members of the PLCs, paraprofessionals indicated that their feelings of their value were increased. Therefore, paraprofessionals valued the opportunity to become a part of the PLCs in the juvenile correctional facility that allowed deepened job satisfaction and broadened professional relationships with other paraprofessionals as well as teachers.

Limitations of the Study

Yin (2009) indicated that case studies gain insight on a single phenomenon in a natural setting through holistic pictures and depth of understanding. The sample size of four teachers (the lead teacher was exempted) and three paraprofessionals focusing on one area constituted a limitation of scope, but the data allowed a rich narrative to develop. Besides, the single interviews that occurred at one point in time may also limited my research study due to the inability to compare responses overtime and no baseline data available to review about actual teaching practice and student learning. However, I reviewed the responses multiple times to provide a descriptive picture of the participants' perspectives.

Being an insider or a member of the PLC studied may limit the data collection by assuming to understand the participants' responses (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I am the only special education teacher at the facility. Therefore, I am the only teacher who rotates other classes to ensure that the accommodations of the IEPs are adhered to and have a professional rapport with all of the professionals. My insider status helped with recruitment of participants and enable collaboration throughout the interviews as well as review of field notes for clarification. Despite my experiences in this unique environment, my knowledge or perspectives could not be used as data. To minimize my subjectivity and possible influence, I continued to inform the participants about the reason for the study, reviewed data with participants for understanding, and reported the exact responses from the participants throughout the study.

Data collector characteristics and biases can threaten the validity in qualitative case studies (Merriam, 2009). I minimized this chance, because I asked the same questions of all participants, and each participant designated a place to be interviewed. Additionally, I did not identify the educators and ensured that all information was confidential.

According to Yin (2009), the transferability of research results gives qualitative case studies validity. Therefore, transferability may be realistic for other schools of this unique status with similar features. The findings from this case study can benefit other schools that face similar issues related to implementing and utilizing PLCs or other newly introduced reform efforts. Attention to these limitations enhanced the quality of the study.

Suggestions for Further Research

Schools will continue to be under pressure to increase student achievement and improve teaching strategies. PLCs in schools are used as an avenue for reform to provide teachers with in-house professional development prepare the students at their site (DuFour, 2014). The following are suggestions for further research based on participants' responses and the study's findings:

The first suggestion for further research would be to expand this research study to include a baseline data to compare the before and after effects of PLCs from other areas such as behavior, teacher observations, and student work. A broader picture of the effect of PLC in other areas together would provide more information. A replication of this study may provide new insight at other juvenile correctional facility school to support the initial findings to the phenomenon.

The final suggestion for further research study is to use a mixed method approach to involve quantitative and qualitative research. Qualitative research did provide rich descriptions on the perceptions of PLCs at a juvenile correctional facility. However, quantitative data would provide the effects of PLCs on students' academic and behavioral performances in a variety of subject areas. This mixed method approach could also add to the body of research about PLCs.

Recommendations

This research contains recommendations for this school as well as for other juvenile correctional facility schools to utilize and implement PLC successfully. PLC need to continue at this juvenile correctional facility school to elicit job-embedded activities to improve student achievement. Because this school site is unique, activities, strategies, accommodations and effective lessons are different from and ordinary school. The culture, student body, classroom setting, and conditions are not the normal environment that educators are commonly accustomed. Therefore, accumulating individualized methods and strategies to use for this student body at this site should continue help educators stay abreast of what work and do not work at this correctional facility.

Teachers should continue to make data-driven decisions based on the students' present and past performances. Data-driven practices have provided positive impacts on student learning. Teachers identified achievement gaps, students' strengths and areas in need of strengthening. Additionally, teachers need to continue with the prescriptive

academic plans described in PLCs that provided differentiated instructions to many students to achieve.

Additionally, the PLC should be discussed from this qualitative study to understand the concept holistically for this school by including:

- Using PLCs to promote professional growth and academic achievement
- Improving teacher learning and practice
- Promoting positive attitudes
- Sharing and collaboration
- Add paraprofessionals to professional learning communities in small schools

The decision to add paraprofessionals to PLCs in other schools should be determined by the instructional staff. This study indicated that the paraprofessionals benefitted from the PLC at this juvenile correctional facility. A school with one teacher in each of the six subject areas with a small number of paraprofessionals may also benefit from including paraprofessionals in their community. The main focus is for paraprofessionals to understand and be aware of duties to assist the teacher and support the students.

Collaboration among professionals is beneficial to establish relationships to share and elicit information in PLCs. Professionals are constantly developing plans, strategies, modifications and techniques in a cooperative and supportive manner to solve academic achievement problems. Therefore, some recommendations for PLCs to be successful are mentioned. First, members need to use the allotted time to work toward their shared goals. Second, PLC members need to prioritize concerns to be discussed. For instance,

some PLC problems may not need to be discussed by the entire team. Therefore, the larger PLC problems should be brought before the team to discuss the matter with a great deal of thought. Third, members need to keep an open communication between administration and faculty about the benefits of PLCs. Next, topics discussed are student centered and evidenced based. Furthermore, administrators need to talk to incumbent faculty members about PLCs to participate through collaboration and sharing. Lastly, members need to ensure that participants are supported while actively engaged in developing individualized educational plans to improve student achievement. Teachers may become reluctant about changing some ways used in the past, but this change was viewed as positive and meaningful to improve student learning and teaching strategies, methodology, and beliefs about teaching.

Implications for Positive Social Change

After implementing and utilizing a PLC at a juvenile correctional facility school, the participants can benefit from PLCs. The first implication is that participants will need to collaborate to share their concerns. Isolation is in the past while open communication, collaboration, sharing, and professional relationships have flourished in the present. The second implication is that teachers will learn from each other. Based on the findings of this study, juvenile correctional facility schools may benefit from engaging instructional staff in PLCs to better prepare their incarcerated students. As more teachers engage in PLCs, teacher effectiveness, lesson designs and professional relationships among peers will improve teacher learning while leading to improved student achievement.

Conclusion

This research was designed to describe the perceptions and beliefs of teachers and paraprofessionals after utilizing and implementing a PLC at a juvenile correctional facility school. According to the teachers, the PLCs were highly effective and beneficial in guiding veteran and newly hired teachers to data-driven activities, strategies, accommodations and techniques to benefit this juvenile correctional facility school. The participation in the PLC improved collaboration and feedback to motivate educational personnel by developing social relationships to improve teacher knowledge as well as increase student achievement. PLCs provided opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals to share and lean on each other to understand and provide solutions for problems existed in this correctional facility school. Although initially the paraprofessionals did not understand the benefits of PLCs, over time teachers and paraprofessionals bonded together by establishing a professional relationship with each other to extend their knowledge. Professionals depended on each other within their environment in PLCs to engage in ongoing learning, to improve instruction, and to tackle the challenges set before them.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What contributions have helped you develop professionally that you gained from your professional learning community?
2. How has the PLC contributed to your professional growth? Can you give some examples that would support your growth?
3. After developing PLCs, what topics do you discuss in your professional learning community?
4. Has your participation in a PLC made any difference in your perspective or attitude? Why?
5. What conflicts have existed in your professional learning community?
6. How comfortable do you feel toward making decisions in your professional learning community?
7. How would you describe collaborating and sharing in your professional learning community?

Probing Questions

1. Can you provide an example?
2. Can you clarify?

3. Please describe what you mean?

4. I have heard several people mention _____. I am curious as to what others think about that?

5. Is there anything you would like to add?

Appendix B: Research Log: Face-to-Face Interviews

Participant's Code: _____

Date of Interview: _____

By: Altarene Brown

Questions listed by numbers by question	**Responses & Notes**	**Summation**
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

7		