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Vicki Ross-Norris

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Walden University
2017

Abstract

Literacy Training in an Urban High School Professional Learning Community

by

Vicki Ross-Norris

MA, Villanova University, 1984

BS, University of the District of Columbia, 1973

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Teacher Leadership

Walden University

April 2017

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of professional learning experiences shared by teachers who participated in a professional learning community (PLC) at a New York City high school in the South Bronx. Guided by Hord‘s PLC characteristics and Bruner's constructivism theories, this phenomenological study addressed the research questions of what PLC practices urban high school teachers employ to support the academic-literacy achievement of their students of low social economic status (SES); the role of administration in the PLC process; and the roles of a shared mission, values, vision, norms, and collaborative knowledge on the functioning of the PLC. Data collected from the 6 PLC teachers included semi-structured individual interviews, observations of PLC meetings over a 2-month period, participating teacher reflective journal entries, and a researcher's log. Manual data analysis consisted of reading raw data multiple times. Additionally, concept and descriptive coding approaches facilitated data source analysis. Gerund words and short phrases generated labels and categories that resulted symbolic representation. The results were that the urban high school teachers demonstrated Hord's PLC characteristics and Bruner's constructivism theories within their PLC's practices and principles leading to decision-making and solutions to problems such as improving teachers' literacy practices, students' literacy skills and classroom behavior, and school wide Individualized Educational Plan process. The findings of this study support the engagement of urban high school teachers in self-directed PLC activities that may promote social change by improving literacy instruction and literacy achievement among students of low SES.

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Dedication

This body of work is dedicated to my daughter, without whose caring support it would not have been possible to take my doctoral journey. Additionally, I dedicate my research study to my loving parents, Roderick Ronald and Estelle Blackwell, and my brother Roderick Ronald Ross, Jr., who passed on a love for learning, reading, and respect for education. It is their accumulative strengths, love, and the memories of them, I carry and for which my mere expression of thanks does not suffice.

Acknowledgments

I would not have been able to take this journey nor write this doctoral study without the patient help and support of the many kind people I met along the way, to only a few is it possible to mention here. Without the dedication and tireless assistance of Dr. Gipe and Dr. Dimarzo, I would have not been able to complete my doctoral study. Dr. Gipe's unsurpassed knowledge about the importance of teacher leadership, literacy, and social change were guideposts as I walked through my ideas and those of the countless scholars I read along my way. Additionally, Dr. Gipe's belief in my effort to reform the urban educational system of our nation was the wind beneath my wings when it seemed to be no breeze to guide me through my mission. Dr. Dimarzo was the second breath of air from which I drew from during my doctoral exploration. Dr. Gipe and Dr. Dimarzo's invaluable academic knowledge and thoughtful responses increased my knowledge and understanding for which I am extremely grateful. Last, but not least, I thank Maggie Linton, Andrea Caputo, Shira Eve Epstein, and Daniel Voloch, for their friendship, sincere support, and assistance throughout my journey.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Since the 1990s, governments around the world have been concerned with student acquisition of literacy skills (Draper, 2008; Gee & Levine, 2009; Kennedy, 2010, 2014; Richardson, 2008). The US legislature passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, requiring the implementation of teacher practices that would narrow the gap between students of low socioeconomic status (SES) and their counterparts of high SES (Kennedy, 2010; 2014). Initially, as an unintentional failure to include high schools the text of the NCLB Act mentioned high schools only twice (Wise, 2009). Passage of Title II, Part A addressed the unintended NCLB oversight and allocated $2.5 billion a year to improve teaching and teacher leadership (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Duncan (2011) noted that, even with the funding, teachers throughout the United States were frustrated because they were required to attend outmoded and unproductive workshops, while principals have reported that their professional development efforts were largely unsuccessful and student outcomes were below grade level. Consequently, effective professional training for teachers that prepare educators to improve the academic literacy of their students is minimal to none (Ariza, 2010; Beltran, 2012; Duncan, 2011; Ness, 2009).

Katzenmeyer and Moller (2009) and Hord and Tobia (2012) suggested that effective teacher-development programs were the most successful way to improve student literacy achievement. Wilson, Grisham, and Smetana (2009) and Owen (2016) stated that reform of teacher–literacy training is imperative because it makes possible the changes necessary in both educators and their students. Other researchers support the need for continual teacher training as a necessary component of the education system (DuFour, 2014; DuFour, & Eaker, 2009; Duncan, 2011; Eun; 2008; Grenier, 2010; Hord, 2004, 2009; Silver, 2009; Owen, 2016; Torff & Sessions, 2009). Grenier (2010), Torff and Sessions (2009), as well as Weiner and Jerome (2016) suggested that urban teachers who teach students of low SES encounter different challenges than teachers of students from families of high SES and, therefore, effective professional development should meet the needs of each student population.

This study explored the professional development needs of urban high school teachers with a sample of educators located within New York City (NYC). The educators were participants of a professional learning community (PLC) wherein they shared literacy methodology allowing them to meet the specific literacy needs of students from families of low SES. In this phenomenological qualitative study, I explored literature that examined the national and local status of teacher professional development, the effectiveness of teacher training, teachers' perceptions of professional development, professional learning communities, literacy coaching, Critical Friends Groups (CFG), and narrative, grounded, ethnography, and phenomenological qualitative research methods.

Problem Statement

The problem of interest in this study was the relationship between the lack of professional development provided to teachers within urban high schools and literacy. This population of educators encountered myriad challenges associated with teaching literacy skills to urban students of low SES (Beltran, 2012; Samson & Collins, 2012; Torff & Sessions, 2008). Researchers have found that literacy-training opportunities for urban high school teachers provide a plethora of general methods for teaching that discount analytical examination supporting the specialized literacy skills all students require for full comprehension (Beltran, 2012; Cho & Reich, 2008; Ness, 2009; Nokes, 2010; Wilcox & Angelis, 2012). In addition, with the onset of the Technology Age, teachers need to be collaborative catalysts who reflect upon their understanding and abilities in ways that maintain their knowledge of advancements within their disciplines (Hord & Tobia, 2012; Musanti & Pence, 2010; Zuljan, Zuljan, & Pavlin, 2011).

Cantrell, Burns, and Callaway (2009) and Torff (2016) stated that if taught effective literacy methodology, teachers could change their perceptions of who should implement literacy instruction. Many high school teachers believe literacy professional development in is unnecessary (Rooney, 2015, Wilson et al., 2009). These educators tend to be unenthusiastic teachers with the notion that literacy instruction is the responsibility of English teachers or lower grade teachers (Bahous, Busher, & Nabhani, 2014; Torff, 2016). They also tend to view professional development in literacy as falling short of the instructional needs of their students (Cantrell et al., 2009; Lesley & Matthews, 2009; McCross-Yergian & Krepps, 2010; Ness, 2009; Samson & Collins, 2012). Torff and Sessions (2008) stated that urban teachers were even more resistant to implementing literacy instruction.

It is crucial that urban teachers of students from families of low SES participate in effective literacy training because this student population is the most rapidly growing segment within U.S. public schools (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009, 2012). On average, the literacy skill of this student group is below their grade level (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009, 2010a, 2010b, 2012; Muijs, Harris, Chapman, Stoll, & Russ, 2009). During the 2014-2015 school year, NYC served 978,121 public-school students (New York City Department of Education [NYC DOE], 2015). Of these students, 144,000 were from families with at least one foreign-speaking parent New York Department of Education (New York Department of Education [NYC DOE] 2015). The overall high school graduation rate for 2015 in NYC was

70%, while the graduation rate for high school students of low SES was 65% (Harris, 2016). Many circumstances contribute to this problematic gap; however, the most prominent was literacy training for teachers that specifically addressed the needs of urban high school students of low SES (Cantrell et al., 2009; Nokes, 2010; Torff, 2016; Torff & Byrnes, 2011; Torff & Sessions, 2008).

In this study, I explored a NYC PLC's collaborative activities to determine whether the PLC theory of Hord (2004, 2009) and the constructivism theory of Bruner (1973) influenced teacher quality and student learning. Table 1 shows the characteristics of a PLC, which includes collective leadership, learning, learning discussion, and application. These elements also served as the secondary theoretical foundation of this study.

Much literature addressed the advantages of creating, implementing, and sustaining PLCs (DuFour, 2011; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kruse & Louis, 2008; Owen, 2014b; Owen, 2016; Stewart. 2014). Far fewer studies have explored the research-based characteristics of urban high school PLCs that address the needs of educators who teach students of low SES (Robinson, 2010; Torff & Session, 2008). Less published data pertain to the formulation of PLCs than to the specific literacy preparedness of this student population (Beltran, 2012; Cho & Reich, 2008; Grenier 2010; Ness, 2009; Nokes, 2010; Torff & Byrnes, 2011). Therefore, this study is significant because it has the potential to improve local and national urban high school teachers' literacy training and improve low SES students' academic literacy achievement.

Table 1

Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities

Characteristic	Description
Supportive and shared leadership	Equal influence in decision-making and facilitating.
Shared mission, values, and vision	Fundamental responsibility to attain purpose and participation to develop clear guidelines of how members operate to improve student academic achievement.
Collective learning and learning application	Shared inquiry for new knowledge that meets student challenges and implementation of the newly obtained knowledge toward improved student achievement.
Shared practice	Peer review through observation and discussion preceded by walkthroughs and intervisitations (i.e., visiting peer classrooms), as well as planning sessions and other meetings.
Supportive conditions	Commitment to when, where, and how PLC members meet to collaborate on their learning, decision-making, problem solving, teacher roles, and communication structure (i.e., the social and physical needs allowing members to freely participate to improve their creative body of work.

Source. Hord, S. M. (1997). Descriptions of the characteristics of professional learning communities. *Professional learning communities: communities of continuous inquiry and improvement* (p. 14-25). Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Nature of this Study

This study included digitally recorded and transcribed, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews as the primary method of data collection, which correlated with the phenomenological tradition (Creswell, 2009. 2014; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Data analysis included textual and structural descriptions identifying the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009, 2014). To optimize understanding of urban high school teachers' PLC experiences, data collection included observations of their PLC meetings, one-on-one semi-structured tape-recorded interview with each participant, and related field notes, as well as their teacher journal entries and my researcher's log. The observation field notes only recorded the activities of the participants who agreed to take part in the study. These data-collection techniques included an audio-recorded one-on-one semi-structured interview of the participants' perspective of their PLC experiences. Triangulating the teacher journal entries, teacher interviews, observation field notes, and my researcher's log ensured the trustworthiness of this study. Creswell (2009, 2014), as well as Merriam and Tisdale (2016), recommended the use of a researcher's log, or *bracketing,* as a way of validating the authenticity of study findings. Bracketing is an honest narrative that clarifies researcher bias (Creswell, 2003, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2002, 2009; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

Research Questions

The evidence-based conceptual foundations of Hord's (2004, 2009) PLC characteristics and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories guided the following research questions:

1. What PLC practices do urban high school teachers employ to support the academic-literacy achievement of their students of low SES?

2. What role does administrative assistance play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers?
3. What roles do a shared mission, norms, values, and leadership play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers?
4. What roles do collaborative knowledge and use of that knowledge play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers and, in turn, their classroom instruction?

In Section 3, I examine the methodology, design, research significance, research questions, context, and role of the researcher. Section 3 also includes sample selection, ethical protection, time and data management, data collection, and analysis procedures. Additionally, the validity and reliability of this phenomenological case study is within Section 3..

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the essence of professional experiences shared by urban high school teachers who participated in literacy PLC meetings. The aim was to gain a clearer understanding of how urban high school teachers constructed their literacy practice to influence their own learning and that of their students. In the United States, millions of children were literacy deficient including urban high school students of low SES within NYC (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2009, 2015). This student population lacks the most significant literacy criterion for academic success (Division of Students with Disabilities and ELLs, 2011; Draper, 2008; Gee & Levine, 2009; Kennedy, 2010, 2014; Richardson, 2008). Approximately 1.2 million high school students within the United States do not graduate and attempt to enter the workforce with low literacy skills (Cataldi, Laird, & Kewal-Ramani, 2009). African-American and Hispanic students comprise a disproportionate segment of urban students of low SES with literacy deficiencies (Alliance for Excellent

Education, 2009; Madrid, 2011). The dropout rate for these students was double that of their European-American counterparts (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Palardy, 2008; Rampey, Dion, & Donahue, 2009; Swanson, 2009; Wall, 2016).

Brogan (2009) stated that a large percentage of high school students from families of low SES were of African-American and of Hispanic descent. During 2015, the U.S. DOE reported that the average reading score for African-American 12th-grade high school students was 266 and the average reading score for Hispanic 12th-grade students was 276, while their European-American counterparts' average reading score was 295. Furthermore, Burman and Beattie (2014) reported that ELLs graduated at a rate of 31% and students of low SES graduated at a rate of 66%, while their counterpoints of high SES graduated at a rate 94%. Burman and Beattie (2014) also stated that urban 12th-grade ELLs and other 12th-grade students of low SES increased their reading scores and graduation rates; however, the U.S. DOE, and Burman and Beattie's reports indicated there was still a need for further work.

Hispanic students who are the majority of low SES students in the United States "will drive future demographic growth and diversification well into the twenty-first century," and therefore, the proficiency of their literacy skills will determine the success or failure of the U.S.'s social and economic growth (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009, p. 1). If the United States is to continue its contributions globally, it is mandatory that African-American and Hispanic students of low SES acquire a high-quality education including high-standards literacy preparedness (Biancarosa & Snow, 2003, 2006; Brogan 2009; Hooley, Tysseling, & Ray, 2013; Madrid, 2011; National Council of La Raza [NCLR] 2010).

The findings may make a positive contribution to social change by stimulating further discussion among urban high school educators on how to create, implement, and maintain PLCs within their schools. Additionally, the results of this study hold promise for positive social change by providing urban high school teachers and administrators with a PLC model that improves teacher literacy knowledge and provides effective instructional strategies within this subject area. The research results may not only increase the ability of urban high school teachers to teach literacy skills to their students. Therefore, the research findings may indirectly increase the number of high school graduates from families of low SES, which Beltran (2012), Muijs et al. (2009), NCLR (2010) stated is possible if high school teachers receive opportunities to develop, put in place, and sustain PLC activities and principles that meet their needs and the needs of their students.

Conceptual Framework

The research-based theories of Hord (2004, 2009) and Bruner (1973) formed the conceptual framework of this study (see Table 1). As articulated by Hord, a PLC increases teacher knowledge, which results in increased student achievement. Hord defined the reciprocal learning theory as a shared environment within which educators establish a school climate that generates joint collaboration, emotional support, and individual and group development as they work collectively to attain shared learning not obtainable independently. The conceptual framework of this study also related to the findings of DuFour (2011); Hord and Sommers (2008), Kruse and Louis (2008), and Wilcox and Angelis (2012), all of whom advocated the Hord characteristics of PLC theory (i.e. supportive and shared leadership, a shared mission, values, and vision, collective learning and learning application, and conditions sustaining a PLC).

Secondary Theoretical Foundation

Bruner's (1973) constructivism theory was the secondary theoretical foundation in this study. Bruner's theory coincides with the work of Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky (Phelps, 2002). Constructivism was the notion that individuals obtain knowledge by constructing a sense of their world that is consistent with their own experiences (Center for Teaching and Learning Services, 2009; Huitt, 2009). Knowledge is not a passive accumulation of facts, but rather, an active evaluation and discovery process that comes from within and is stimulated by the shaping and formulating of logic from personal experience (Huitt, 2009; Phelps, 2002). Constructivism is a constructivist learning and leadership theory that supports the conceptual framework of PLCs (Dufour, 2011; Hord, 2004, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Kruse, & Louis, 2008; Peterson & Deal, 2009).

Bruner (1973) noted that the components of the constructivist learning process include the selection and transformation of information, decision-making, the generating of hypotheses, and drawing meaning from information and experiences. Hoover (1996) stated, "Constructivist teacher professional development give[s] teachers time to make explicit understanding of their learning of teaching" (p. 2). Bruner further asserted that constructivism provides the learner an opportunity to view and use prior knowledge, select desired topics of learning, construct new knowledge, create inferences surrounding what is learned, and make decisions with the goal of assimilating new experiences into current situations. Constructivist learning within teacher development in the form of PLCs includes dynamic engagement, metacognition, demonstration, deliberation, feedback, and application that meet the needs of shared norms, mission, values, goals, and leadership (Hord, 2004, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Hord & Tobia, 2012; Knowles, Holton & Swamson, 2012). Metacognitive constructivist learning establishes cohesive and focused networks that advance teacher learning and lead to improved academic achievement in students (Elbousty & Bratt, 2009; Hord, 2004, 2009; Hord & Hirsh, 2009; Lambert, 2002, 2006; Motoko & Liang, 2016).

The establishment of PLCs of teachers by the NYC DOE spurred this research (New York State Education Department, 2015). Since 2004, NYC DOE began engaging in an inquiry initiative designed to shift the manner in which administrators and teachers view causal factors for academic failure in students and how struggling students can achieve proficiency (Talbert, 2011). Robinson (2010) stated that, since 2010, the NYC public school system evolved its professional development approach into collaborative inquiry, in which instructional teams of teachers (i.e., PLCs) analyzed student-performance data and student work to identify learning shortfalls and to target effective instructional strategies. Robinson further stated that the process empowered administrators and educators to decide what and how teachers taught and therefore influenced school wide instructional decisions. Although this approach appears rather logical and straightforward, minimal data exist on the detailed practices of the NYC DOE and collaborative inquiry, as it relates to literacy (Robinson, 2010).

This research explored a PLC focused on literacy. The goal of this study was to improve the literacy skills of its students of low SES population and increase their high school and college enrollment, retention, and graduation rates. The teachers who participated in the PLC used literacy-driven curricula and other resources, to unify and pace instruction. At the meetings, the PLC members examined student work to detect learning gaps and focused on teaching methodologies that meet national Common Core Standards and, in turn, improve teacher instruction and student learning. Literacy coaching and Critical Friends Groups (CFGs) were the professional development strategies used to facilitate teacher learning. The results of this study increased knowledge surrounding how urban high school teachers apply the specific research-based characteristics of a PLC and constructivism to improve the literacy achievement of their low SES students.

Definition of Terms

This study used the following terms and definitions:

Collaboration: Joint professional discussions; "… cooperative practices, and activities that teachers engage in to achieve their shared educational goals (Ning, Lee, & Lee, 2015, p. 339).

Critical-Friends Group (CFG): A group of teacher leaders who use systematic structural dialogue to enhance their professional learning and the professional learning of their colleagues (School Reform Initiative, 2014).

Literacy: Student metacognitive reading, writing, listening, and discussing fluency skills used to comprehend complex subject-dominate text in science, mathematics, history, geography, and English (Carnegie Council on Advancing Adolescent Literacy, 2010; Curwen, Miller, & Calfee, 2010; Iwai, 2016).

Literacy coaching: A continual one-on-one collaborative literacy professional development for adults in which the members are co-learners. The members of a literacy coaching team construct and reflect upon literacy practices to improve student literacy achievement (Howe, & Barry, 2016).

Professional development: Research-based inquiry approaches wherein teachers are both the theme and entity of the process. Teacher professional development involves the construction of their own research-based knowledge upon student achievement and investigation of their own practices. As a result, teachers collaborate, share views, and jointly reflect upon their learning and its influence on student achievement (Chou, 2011; Whitford, & Barnett, 2016).

Professional learning community (PLC): The ongoing process of collaborative inquiry by which administrators and teachers seek learning grounded in their shared goals, visions, and missions. The goal of a PLC is to improve instruction, which in turn, benefits student academic achievement (Hord, 2004, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Hord & Tobia, 2012).

Urban high school students of low SES: Children from households and communities ranked within the low-economic quartile, which results in inferior education opportunities, low-literacy environments, chronic stress affecting early childhood development, high dropout rates, poverty, and poor health (American Psychological Association, 2012). Such youth were more likely to develop fewer academic skills than those from families and communities of higher SES (Morgan, Farkas, Hillemeier, & Maczuga, 2009). Schools within low-SES communities do not tend to attract qualified teachers or the funding to offer quality instructional material, which negatively affects the academic achievement of students from low-SES environments (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008).

Urban high school teachers who teach students from families of low SES: Educators teaching high school students ranked in a low economic quartile (American Psychological Association, 2012). Teachers of these students were less likely to be well qualified, which has a direct correlation with student achievement (Gimbert, Bol, & Wallace, 2007; Muijs et al., 2009).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Many assumptions existed within this study. The first was the capability to manage a reasonable and impartial study of PLC members’ practices and principles. Another assumption was that the community participants would offer honest, forthright, and detailed perceptions to allow for a collection of rich data. A related assumption was that the educators who participate in the PLC possess a wealth of knowledge surrounding the practices of the community and wish to contribute continuously to promote social change. I also assumed that, during observation, the participants would behave naturally, demonstrating sincere interaction. A further assumption was that the participants of this study would provide artifacts that would expand the exploration into the creation, implementation, and continuation of their PLC. An additional assumption was that the educators made adjustments in the protocol of the PLC since its conception and were active members in establishing and redefining the research-based characteristics of their PLC. The final assumption was that, within the limited time of this study, the contextual framework revealed the characteristics of the PLC through the participant interviews, meeting observations, and entries within the teacher journals and my researcher's log.

Creswell (2013) asserted that the phenomenological researcher "recognizes and specifies the broad philosophical assumptions [and] write[s] about the reality and experiences of individuals not from the subjective perspective of the researcher" (p. 81). Therefore, recognition and identification of the wide-ranging theoretical suppositions of this study allowed me to "bracket out" consciously personal experiences (p. 81). I chose to "bracket out" my bias because Creswell (2013), Merriam (2009) and Merriam and Tisdale (2016) suggested that bracketing is one of the integral parts of phenomenological research because it allows the researcher to refrain from judgments, ensuring vigor, validity, and trustworthiness of the data and its collection.

Due to the nature of the research, this study had limitations, specifically: size and location. Two out of six educators volunteered their participation in the research. The small sample was characteristic of a phenomenological study. Creswell (2013) explained that a small sample gives the researcher the opportunity to gain greater understanding of the experiences of the participants, therefore enabling rich, descriptive text of participant behavior. However, a limited sample does not allow for generalization of the findings (Creswell, 2013). Merriam (2009) asserted that, in qualitative research, a researcher does not seek to generalize because revealing "the particular in depth" is the aim rather than "what is true of the many" (p. 224). The specific location of NYC was another limitation of this study, and confined the study to the site where the sample participated in their PLC. This limits generalization of the findings to any other group of educators within any other state or country.

I designed this study to explore the process of forming, implementing, and sustaining a PLC in relationship to the characteristics of Hord's (2004, 2009) PLC theory and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theory. The specific delimitations of issue, time, and location of this study furthered understanding of the structure and function of an urban PLC. The research interest was not in studying the PLC population; it was in exploring a sample of urban high school teachers as they moved through the process of establishing, implementing, and maintaining their PLC activities. This exploration revealed the research-based characteristics of a recently formed PLC through the lens of specific educators who participated in PLC activities through collaborative learning. The scope of this study's bounds was identifiable participants who played a role in meetings of the PLC. Another time boundary involved observation of the essence of the educator experiences during the 2014-2015 school year. The urban setting represented the final delimitation of this study.

Significance of this Study

At the writing of this study, many urban high school students of low SES were unable to execute literacy skills proficiently; however, coupled with demands surrounding teacher accountability, the lack of adequate literacy training for their educators exacerbates this problematic situation (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2012; Duncan, 2011; Ness, 2009; Nokes, 2010). Without an increase in professional development grant funds, it is conceivable that urban high school teachers may resort to the traditional methods of isolated professional development through books, seminars, DVDs, or Internet courses (Duncan, 2011; Laurillard, 2016; Torff & Sessions, 2008, 2009). In 2012, the Commission on Effective Teachers and Teaching Training (CETT) and in 2009 Wise (2009) suggested that to manifest positive change, these teachers need targeted literacy training that meets the needs of their students.

Professional learning communities offer methodology quite different from the historically isolated process of professional development by supporting teachers as they become collaborative learners and more effective educators (Cantrell et al., 2009; CETT, 2012; Chong & Kong, 2012; Lesley & Matthews, 2009; McCross-Yergian & Krepps, 2010; Ness, 2009; Stewart, 2014; Torff & Sessions, 2008). Egodawatte, McDougall, and Stoilesc (2011) stated that "teacher collaboration is an integral part of creating a positive work environment where teachers work together to make way for students to achieve success" (p. 195). This exploration of a collaborative PLC approach has potential for learning what works through research, fracturing the myth of isolated professional development and practice, and promoting social change through the professional development of urban educators teaching literacy skills to students of low SES. On the local level, this study added to the limited body of knowledge about how urban high school teachers create, implement, and sustain a research -based literacy PLC (Robinson, 2010; Torff & Session, 2008). Additionally, this study holds educational significance because it may stimulate conversations among local urban high school teachers, administrators, and district leaders to reconfigure their literacy PLCs to meet the needs of teacher and student learning.

Summary

The ultimate goal of professional teacher training is to improve student achievement (Hord, 2004, 2009; Walker, 2015). Millions of American children do not possess the necessary literacy skills to succeed academically; therefore, the United States is at risk of lacking the ability to meet national and global economic needs (Alliance, 2009; Samson & Collins, 2012). The literacy crisis within the United States is not the result of a lack of knowledge surrounding how to improve literacy in American students (Biancarosa, & Snow, 2006; Hord & Tobia, 2012). Rather, the problem is in how the U.S. education system bridges the gap between what is fact and how that knowledge is used to improve teacher and student learning (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Duncan, 2011, Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2009; McDonald, Polnick, & Robles-Pina, 2013; NCLR, 2010).

Most African-American and Hispanic students of low SES represent the student population most affected by the literacy deficit in this country (Aikens & Barbarin, 2008; Anyon, 2014; NYC DOE, 2015; Palardy, 2008; Rampey, et al. 2009; Swanson, 2009). To improve the professional development training of urban high school teachers, and potentially the literacy achievement in students of low SES, this study explored the principles and practices used by urban high school teachers during their PLC meetings. Such research may promote social change by improving the state of the literacy crisis throughout the United States and contributing to the education gap between students of low and high SES.

In this study, I described the national and local phenomenon encountered by urban high school teachers regarding the lack of effective professional literacy training. I addressed the activities that could enable high school educators to create, implement, and sustain a research-based literacy PLC that meets their own instructional needs, as well as the learning needs of their students of low SES. Despite the lack of success with experienced literacy-based PLCs, the NYC DOE has promoted professional development reform (Robinson, 2010). Robinson asserted further causal factors for the gap between effective research-based PLCs focused on literacy within urban high schools and their implementation remains unknown.

The purpose of this study was to explore the essence of professional experiences shared by urban high school teachers who participate in a literacy PLC. The conceptual framework of five characteristics of PLCs (Hord, 2004, 2009) and the constructivism theory (Bruner, 1973) form the theoretical context of this study. The scholarly literature reviewed for this study defined and supported eight related terms. Included were various assumptions and limitations, as well as the scope and delimitations of this study. The significance of the research was its potential to provide direction via the contextual experiences of teachers, administrators, and school-district officials toward the development of effective research-based PLCs.

It was important to this study to examine existing literature on the status of professional development for educators, the perceptions of urban teachers with regard to their professional development, and on pivotal programs such as Literacy Coaching and CFGs. In a review of related studies, I examined how shared leadership protocols formulate, implement, and sustain research-based PLCs.

Section 2 includes a comprehensive review of literature, which discusses the status of professional development, its effectiveness, urban high school teachers' perceptions of professional development, and teacher training in constructivist PLC environments. An overview of the characteristics of PLCs and the constructivism theory, followed by detailed discussions about literacy coaching and CFGs were included in Section 2. Additionally, Section 2 reviews literature related to phenomenological approach to research and other possible research methods considered for this study. Section 3 incorporates a thorough discussion of research methodology. The beginning of Section 3 discusses research design, its significance as well as its rationalization, context, the research questions that guide in this study, the qualitative phenomenological research paradigm, and the role of the researcher. Furthermore, Section 3 contains a comprehensive discussion of participant ethical protection, and the criteria for participant selection. Next, Section 3 discusses the data collection, data analysis procedures and use of software. Section 3 encompasses a discussion of the steps taken to justify the validity and credibility of this study. Subsequently, Section 4 includes the results of the data collection, evidence of quality, and summary of the study. Finally, Section 5 contains the discussion, conclusion, and recommendation for further research.

Section 2: Literature Review

Overview

This review of literature includes books and peer-reviewed and non-peer-reviewed journals and articles related to the effective professional development of teachers and PLCs. I reviewed professional development DVDs and documents pertaining to local and national professional development projects. The data collected ranged from terminology to procedures common to PLCs. Potential causal factors for the failure of PLCs emerged in this review. Connections were evident between this study's research questions and the findings of past studies. From the literature reviewed, I discovered the conceptual framework of a PLC from which I developed many hypothetical perceptions. The descriptions of differing methodologies employed within similar studies support the methodology used in this study.

I found research-based and theoretical sources in the literature via the ProQuest database of periodicals, which included other databases such as CSA Illumina, Chadwyck-Healey, UMI, eLibrary, SIRS, and CultureGRams. I found more research in the Sage full-text database, as well as in Google Scholar, EBSCOhost Publishing, Academic Search Premier, and the U.S. DOE Institute of Education Science database sponsored by the Education Research Information Center. I used the following keywords to conduct my search: collaboration, CFGs, literacy, literacy coaching, professional development, PLC, urban high school students of low SES, and urban high school teachers who teach students from families of low SES.

Status of Professional Development for Teachers

Mitchell (2015) reported that an estimated 5 million English language learner (ELL) students attended grades K-12. Mitchell continued that the shift in student demographics and public opinion about the methods in which ELLs are educated has transformed the literacy education of ELLs. Therefore, the changing student population complicates the issue of professional development for educators (Beltran, 2012; CETT, 2012). Researchers have found that literacy-training opportunities for urban high school teachers provided a plethora of general skills for literacy instruction and did not prepare the teachers to meet the specific needs of their urban high school students (Beltran, 2012; CETT, 2012; Cho & Reich, 2008; Ness, 2009; Samson & Collins, 2014; Nokes, 2010). Cantrell et al. (2009) and Torff (2016) advanced that, during times of uncertainty, high school teachers can improve their perceptions and practices if given the skills to implement effective literacy methodology. To bridge the gap between the professional development of urban high school teachers in literacy and the literacy needs of their students, this study explored how Hord's (2004, 2009) research-based PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories were instituted, and the manner in which these constructs influenced this study's participants and the structure and activities of their PLC.

Effectiveness

CETT reported to the National Education Association in 2012 that teacher collaboration was the most effective way to improve teacher quality, academic success for students, and abolish achievement gaps. Teacher training is a key component of student achievement; however, the debate continues as to the optimal method of educating teachers (Duncan, 2011; Hord, 2004, 2009; Zeichner, Payne, & Brayko, 2015). Regardless of the extensive related discussion, research, federal and state laws, and related national commissions, no standardized professional development model is in place for teachers to ensure adequate student achievement (CETT, 2012). Santamaria, Taylor, Park, Kenne, and van der Mandele (2010), Samson and Collins (2012), and Beltran (2012) asserted that the lack of professional literacy training for teachers, coupled with the changing demographics of the student population, renders the lack of teacher knowledge, skills, and confidence in academic literacy a serious shortfall. Cantrell et al. (2009), Samson and Collins (2012) and Torff (2016) advanced that high school teachers must and can improve their perceptions and practices if given the skills to implement effective literacy methodology.

Teacher Perceptions

High school teachers are frequently reluctant to participate in professional development because of their isolated subculture (Fan Tang & Lin Choi, 2009; Torff, 2016; Torff & Sessions, 2009). Many high school teachers have the notion that literacy instruction is the responsibility of lower grade teachers. Additionally, some high school teachers view literacy professional development as unable to meet their instructional needs or the academic needs of their students (Cantrell et al., 2009; Lesley & Matthews, 2009; McCross-Yergian & Krepps, 2010; Neason, 2014; Ness 2009; Wilson et al., 2009).

Torff and Sessions (2009) conducted a 6-point Likert type survey study to explore the perceptions of in-service teachers who instruct students of high SES and those instructing students of low SES. Fifty-eight of the teachers worked in various communities in Brooklyn (urban) and were in the low-SES secondary group, while 103 teachers taught in eight Long Island (suburban) school districts. The findings were similar to those reported by these researchers in an earlier study: secondary teachers instructing students of low SES were less likely to support or use professional development training (Torff & Sessions, 2008). Specifically, the teachers who taught students of low SES had a tendency to think that professional development did not address explicit challenges that lie within their subject area, indicating that the teachers deemed the resources, training, and development activities irrelevant and therefore did not use them in their classrooms (Duncan, 2011; Rooney, 2015; Torff & Sessions, 2008, 2009).

Torff and Sessions (2008, 2009) agreed with other investigators that high school teachers who teach students of low SES did not support professional development in literacy because of the following factors:

- Varying perceptions of what to teach within the classrooms i.e., content vs. literacy skills; (Cantrell et al., 2009; Fan Tang & Lin Choi, 2009).
- Lack of confidence or efficacy in their own literacy training, as well as lack of time to teach literacy skills due to state tests (Cantrell et al , 2009; Wilson et al., 2009).
- Role as "test driven" specialist overshadows their position as a teacher because they did not receive meaningful training (Ness, 2009, p. 1).

Specifically, Torff and Sessions (2009) were in agreement with Cantrell et al. (2009) that secondary mathematics teachers believe that

- Literacy is irrelevant to their subject area.
- They have no knowledge in how to implement literacy skills into their curriculum.
- Students do not need literacy skills in mathematics classes because they need to know how to solve formulas.

Hord (2004, 2009), Neason (2014), and Torff and Sessions (2009) concurred that, similar to any organization, the effectiveness of a professional development was dependent upon the infrastructural protocol, as well as the attitudes of the participants. Torff and Sessions (2008) suggested that further research should examine the differences in teacher perceptions of professional development and possibility lead to effective reform in high schools serving students of low SES. To further understanding of such perceptions, Torff and Byrnes (2011) examined the attitude differences among subject-area teachers concerning professional development and found that teacher participation in professional development/learning activities depended upon the level of benefit they viewed as received by either themselves or their students from their participation.

According to Bruner's (1973) constructivism theory, individuals or groups of individuals construct their learning experiences based upon their needs. Grenier (2010) and the CETT (2012) asserted that, by incorporating the professional needs of the participants, a teacher-centered approach improves and expands teacher knowledge, peer relationships, and eventually creates a community of practice. This is one characteristic of the Hord (2004, 2009) PLC theory. Grenier implied that educators desire teacher-constructed learning experiences because they encourage a communal learning environment within which trust establishes the sense of security needed to share innovative ideas toward learning new strategies.

As noted earlier, teacher unwillingness to enhance their skills, a lack of effective professional development that meets the needs of both teachers and students, and a lack of teacher efficacy with regard to literacy instruction were all issues discovered by several researchers (CETT, 2012; Duncan, 2011; Grenier, 2010; Torff & Byrnes, 2011; Torff & Sessions, 2008, 2009). Pawan and Ortloff (2011) suggested that restructuring traditional professional development programs was an important component that would encourage teacher participation. Grenier (2010) asserted that such programs must meet the needs of educators to gain their support; otherwise, teachers would not be sufficiently engaged to improve their learning and improve student achievement (Bruner, 1973; Cantrell et al., 2009; Hord, 2009). CETT (2012), Higgins (2016) as well as Grenier, supported Hord's (2004, 2009) assertion that, once shared collegial leadership meets the needs of teachers within a professional development environment, the personal efficacy level of teachers will advance teacher knowledge and increase participation in professional development activities. This, in turn, will improve student achievement (CETT, 2012; Hord, 2004, 2009; Hord & Tobia, 2012; Talbert, 2011).

Professional Learning Communities

The isolationist approach to teaching no longer works because education reform demands that educators think differently about how they learn and how they teach their students to learn (Meirink, Imants, Meijer, & Verloop, 2010; Weiner & Jerome; 2016). Senge (1990) stated that dialogue "is to go beyond any one individual's understanding . . . gain[ing] insights that simply could not be achieved individually" (p. 241). Teacher collaboration has also been defined as a reciprocal experience that facilitates teacher knowledge by encouraging the exchange of ideas, new resources, mutual feedback, inspiration, and moral reinforcement (Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Selinger, & Beckingham, 2004; Choi Fung Tam, 2014; Hord & Tobia, 2012; Meirink, Meijer, & Verloop, 2007).

Scholars have reached a consensus with regard to teacher inquiry and collaboration, promoting PLCs as a continual, complex, and feasible method of school reform (Elbousty & Bratt, 2009; Hord, 2004, 2009; O'Malley, 2010; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Pyhalot, Piertarinen, & Soini, 2015). A PLC is comprised of a group of nonjudgmental, voluntary shareholders who work cooperatively to improve their practice and address the larger issue of improved student achievement (Gilrane, Roberts, & Russell, 2008; Helman & Roshelm, 2015; Huggins, Scheurich, & Morgan, 2011; Monroe-Baillargeon, & Shema, 2010). Members of a PLC gather in a communal or social nature, which engages their supportive and shared leadership, common mission, vision, values and while working as a team they collaborate on ways to meet their perceived training needs and the academic needs of their students (DuFour, 2005, 2011; Helman & Roshelm, 2015; Hord, 2004, 2009; Lunenburg, 2010; Riveros, Newton, & Burgess, 2012).

Lomos, Hofman, and Bosker's (2011) conducted a cluster analysis and hierarchical linear modeling research study that suggested an operational PLC included:

- Shared leadership (i.e., between teachers and administrators) that moved from individual purpose to common goals and missions, and considered the ideas of others
- A mutual mission and goals that were collaborated, reviewed, and revised for the collective good
- Multiple activities, voices, and perspectives that encouraged deliberate teacher learning and knowledge
- Common time and a physical environment that was conducive to open and free inquiry and joint practice that met the needs of teachers and students.

Lomos et al. (2011) supported Hord's (2004, 2009) assertion that the process of creating and sustaining a PLC has a cultural connotation that requires members to recreate the culture of their learning community. The keystone of PLCs lies among the collaborating stakeholders (i.e., teachers, administrators, and district and state leaders) who become "a team of change agents" (Hord & Tobia, 2012; Witte, Beemer, & Arjona, 2010, p. 17). Researchers have agreed that PLC stakeholders change from isolated individual teachers to cooperative teams of teachers empowered to do what is best to improve their learning and ultimately improve the academic achievement of their students (DuFour, 2014; Honawar, 2008; Kruse & Louise, 2008; Lieberman & Miller, 2008; Lunenburg, 2010; Narvaez, & Brimijoin, 2010).

To further the body of knowledge pertaining to effective teacher literacy learning, Quick, Holtzman, and Chaney (2009) used the phenomenological case-study approach. Their research used literature relating to effective literacy professional development, teacher perceptions of useful literacy professional training, and actual literacy professional development experiences of 100 elementary teachers. Quick, Holtzman, and Chaney suggested that effective teacher-development practice that met the needs of both educators and students included activities such as coaching or modeling, dialogue, opportunities for teachers to exercise what they have learned, and obtain feedback. To promote effective teacher learning, educators need opportunities to collaborate or dialogue with one another in a manner that addressed their perceived learning needs (Cho & Reich 2008; Chou, 2011; Elbousty & Bratt, 2009; Hairon, Pin Goh, & Chua, 2015; Thibodeau, 2008). Effective customized PLCs can engage participants in two methods of teacher collaboration: CFGs and literacy coaching (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2008; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009).

Literacy Coaching

As a professional development activity, literacy coaching represents a reciprocal learning process (Hord, 2004, 2009) within which the coach provides the teacher with the independence and flexibility to critically choose (Bruner, 1973) and think and act in a manner that improves his or her craft (Dantonio, 2001). Literacy coaching grants the teacher self-constructed understanding of his or her needs while constructing deeper inferences of learning needs as well as how to implement what is learned (CETT, 2012; Blamey, Meyer, & Walpole, 2008; Bruner, 1973; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). Blamey et al. used a web-based electronic survey that contained open and closed ended questions; the analysis of the data used a mixed method approach. Their research compared how the characteristics for secondary literacy coaches aligned with qualifications, roles, and responsibilities of current literacy coaches. Cantrell and

Hughes' qualitative study used a survey, classroom observations, and interviews to measure teacher personal and collective literacy implementation efficacy.

Applying Bruner's (1973) constructivism theory, the teacher participants of the Blamey et al. (2008) study, as well as the Cantrell and Hughes (2008) study, constructed their own coaching activities or attempted to construct coaching activities. As a result, the teacher participants in Cantrell and Hughes's study found their professional learning stimulated in a way that engaged and improved their personal, general, and collective effectiveness, which also gave them the skills, efficacy, and confidence to improve the academic achievement of their students. The teacher-constructed coaching elevated the experiences, learning, motivation, beliefs, and convictions of the teachers, which supported Bruner (1973), Gross (2010), Hord (2004, 2009), and Zambrana, Ray, Espino, Castro, Cohen, and Eliason (2014) assertions that, when teachers constructed and shared their visions, goals, and missions, their professional development experience was enhanced along with the quality of their teaching.

Blamey et al. (2008) reported a great deal of confusion surrounded the role of coaches, and that many coaches received no clear definition of their role, and therefore, related skills go unused (Duncan, 2011). According to Doerr, (2009), Bloom and Vitcov (2010) Farley-Ripple and Buttram (2014), and Hord and Hirsh (2009), school administrators played a pivotal role in defining the expectations of a coach, which is equally critical to the success of a PLC coach. Therefore, administrators shaped the culture of PLCs and provided necessary time for these communities to meet; articulate open and shared norms, values, leadership, trust, and motivation; and engage in collegial conversation and other constructive dialogue.

Critical-Friends Groups

Education administrators and teachers around the world are adapting various models of PLCs including constructive dialogue among teachers (Burke, Marx, & Berry, 2011; Monroe-Baillargeon & Shema, 2010; Thanh & Mai Nguyen, 2010). A Critical-Friends Group (CFG) is a democratic, reflective, and collaborative group of peers—typically two to ten educators (School Reform Initiative, 2014). The participating teachers have no "chain of command" and meet regularly on a volunteer basis to collaborative because they are interested in improving their practice through cooperative learning (School Reform Initiative, 2014).

In contrast, Vietnam teachers had traditionally worked in isolation from their peers. To improve English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers and students' achievement, Thanh and Mai Nugen (2010) used interviews and observations in the phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of EFL teachers. Thanh and Mai Nguyen explored the influence of a CFG concept with a small group of four Vietnamese teachers—three females and one male. As suggested by Thanh and Mai Nugen, other researchers have agreed that CFGs spur a sense of responsibility among administrators, teachers, and coaches, in addition to changing and improving teacher practice while concurrently increasing student achievement (Burke et al, 2011; School Reform Initiative, 2014). The Thanh and Mai Nguyen participants stated they enjoyed their self-directed experience and the rare opportunity to share and gain greater understanding from targeted learning (Bruner, 1973; Hord, 2004, 2009). They also viewed their CFC experience as building a sense of community that allowed greater learning and the motivation to adjust techniques to improve their teaching (Blankstein, Houston, & Cole, 2010; Hord, 2004, 2009; Lewis, Perry & Hurd, 2009; Hord & Tobia, 2012).

U.S. researchers have also studied the broad ramifications of national CFG and PLC development (Burke et al., 2011; Deuel, Nelson, & Slavit, 2009; DuFour, 2005, 2011; Hord, 2004, 2009; Kennedy, 2010, 2014; School Reform Initiative, 2014). Burke et al. (2011) conducted an in-depth bounded qualitative case research study. The data sources used in their research included artifacts (meeting handouts, e-mail correspondence, materials used in training sessions, and the district's professional development improvement agenda); 3 years of field notes, and observations of principals and assistant principals' meetings. CFG professional development programs, informal conversations about the history and present issues of the district, and 14 formal interviews with principals and teacher coaches were also included in the study.

Burke et al. (2011) reported that, due to the lack of a pilot CFG or focus group in their study, the infrastructural dimensions of CFGs examined led to poor outcomes. During the introduction of the district-wide CFG project, district leaders told participating teachers that the project was a teacher-centered, self-constructed/directed professional development activity, which was appealing to the educators. As the project evolved, teacher reluctance arose when the district suspended its initial notion and adopted a mandated agenda for CFG meetings. Thus, the district administrators took charge of teacher learning, which represented a reversal of what was promised. The top-down actions of the district administrators countered the Bruner (1973) theory, which supported the notion that, for adults to find the motivation to learn successfully, they must construct their own learning practices and principles.

Burke et al. (2011) suggested that their district experiment with a CFG was replete with error because the participants had no knowledge of how to facilitate a CFG meeting nor did they know what made a CFG any different from what they experienced in previous professional development meetings. These researchers asserted that the district dominance and neglect did not allow the teachers the opportunity to create and share their leadership, norms, mission, vision, and values. The researchers also stated that the project rendered the CFG vulnerable to failure because it did not coincide with the Hord's (2004, 2009) PLC characteristics or the Bruner's (1973) constructivist theory that requires the teachers/learners to create, maintain, and sustain their understanding of a learning community and its function within their school. As Torff and Sessions (2009) suggested, negative perceptions create negative responses.

Burke et al. (2011) explained it was common for a segment of the CFG meeting to address other aspects of school improvement, leaving CFG activities with less time for full group exploration. These researchers and other researchers emphasized that professional development via a CFG requires a specific allotment of time for teachers to conduct constructive dialogue to frame strategies toward improved academic achievement in students (Doerr, 2009; Hord, 2004, 2009; Hord & Hirsh, 2009; Lewis et al., 2009; Owen, 2014a; Spanneut, 2010). Burke et al. reported that the obstacles encountered by the district administrators occurred because the teachers' needs were overlooked, which led to a lack of teacher efficacy and motivation. Therefore, the restrictive environment created by the district administrators contradicted Bruner's (1973) suggestion that for adults' learners to learn they must be in an environment that meets their specific needs. Furthermore, Burke et al. continued that the district participating in their study did not build in the appropriate infrastructural time allocation necessary for an effective CFG, as recommended by Hord (2004, 2009).

Research Methods

To explore the manner in which teachers construct, implement, and sustain an effective PLC, I examined literature related to the research method applied in this study. In accordance with Creswell (2009, 2014), I created a research design that included plans and broad procedural assumptions that led to my detailed approach to data collection and analysis. As Merriam and Tisdale (2016) suggested, within the natural environment, I developed questions and procedures that explored the social human problems PLC members faced, while taking part in their PLC meetings. In keeping with Yin (2014), my data analysis included inductive reasoning from within general to more specific themes, with me interpreting themes to draw meaning. Exploring the Czaplicki (2012) definition of phenomenological case study, as it relates to PLCs and collegial coaching via CFGs, solidified the selection of this methodology. Yin (2014) and Merriam and Tisdale (2016) supported the Creswell (2003, 2014) and Czaplicki's (2012) concept of phenomenological case study in that it seeks the underpinning meaning and essence of the experience of an individual or group.

To answer the research questions of this study via the phenomenological case-study tradition, teachers who participate in a PLC that use literacy coaching and CFG activities were the focus of my study. My questions aligned with Yin's (2009) assertion that case-study research permits investigators to "retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real life events such as small group behavior [*sic*] organizational and managerial processes [and] school performance" (p. 4). I examined two PLC participants for evidence of the research-based characteristics of the Hord (2004, 2009) PLC theory and the Bruner (1973) constructivism theory, which were relevant to the phenomenon of the participation of urban high school teachers in literacy coaching via CFGs and PLCs.

The examination of the internal and external validity of this study led to my researching literature to explain the various types of qualitative approaches. Upon completion of the validity check, I conducted a broad study of various qualitative methods (Birks & Mills, 2011; Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). The qualitative approaches investigated were narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography. Additionally, the investigation of several phenomenological qualitative case studies verified the phenomenological case-study approach as the most feasible (Hickman & Kris, 2010; van der Mescht, 2004; Zabloski & Milacci, 2012).

Qualitative study draws from multiple analysis procedures and is a broad approach to research inquiry (Creswell, 2009, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2016; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Merriam and Tisdale (2016) suggested that an appropriate exploration using qualitative research occurs when the examination of various research designs align with research questions. Grounded methodology was one research approach examined for this study. Merriam described the grounded approach as a method of qualitative research that is an inductive comparison of data. The intent of grounded theory is to create hypotheses based upon data collection and to construct theory. Although in this study I explored patterns and themes, its purpose was not to substantiate or construct theory. My research supported an exploration of the essence of the experiences of urban high school teachers while they participated in their PLC activities and determined the prevalence of the constructivism learning theory (Bruner, 1973) and PLC theory (Hord, 2004, 2009) in the professional development learning of this teacher population. Therefore, the grounded research approach was not beneficial for this study.

I also considered narrative research for my study, which Creswell (2009, 2014) described as a form of qualitative investigation that studies a group of individuals by asking a few of the individuals to recount the story of their lives. Merriam and Tisdale (2016) espoused that narrative analysis is a review of retelling or restoring the manner in which individuals live. Shared leadership style is a component of this study of PLCs. Although the professional life stories of the teacher participants may be a contributing factor in the building, implementing, and sustaining of their professional learning; the collective focal point of the research questions was not their life stories, but rather, the PLC activities in which the teachers participate and their response to those activities. Therefore, I determined that narrative research was not a beneficial approach for this study.

Creswell's (2009, 2014) definition of ethnography described a qualitative research method most conducive to this study. He defined the method as a process of making meaning of a phenomenon through the advantage points of an individual or group of individuals. Creswell further asserted that ethnographic research identifies a human society and explores the development of the culture over time. The shared ideals, activities, principles, and language were the culture of PLCs and, therefore, what I explored. My research did not investigate the various other aspects of this high school culture. The learning activities of the participating teachers were the focus, in addition to the relationship between the activities and Bruner's (1973) theory of learning constructivism and Hord's (2004, 2009) PLC theory. Therefore, I concluded that the ethnography approach was not an acceptable method of research for this study.

Reflection

Researchers have agreed that educators who learn how to teach academic-literacy skills are able to assist students in improving their overall academic achievement (Dufour, 2014; Dufour, Dufour, & Eaker, 2009; Graham & Ferriter, 2010; Hord, 2004; 2009; Katz, Earl, & Ben Jaafar, 2009; Samson and Collins, 2012). In my review of literature, I examined the perceptions of high school teachers and the manner in which they approach literacy training with students of low SES. My research examined effective professional development and the practices of PLCs (i.e., literacy coaching and CFGs).

NCLR (2010) and Beltran (2012) suggested that professional development for teachers could lead to solving the gap in academic achievement within populations of ELLs of low SES. Researchers have found that effective literacy training was a top priority for high school teachers (Cho & Reich, 2008, Hord, 2004; Hord & Tobia 2012). However, few researchers have conducted studies to examine the unique challenges faced by this teacher population within urban areas (Desimone & Garet, 2015; Torff & Byrnes, 2011; Torff & Sessions, 2009). Researchers have agreed that reconfiguring traditional professional development programs would meet the learning needs of teachers for shared collegial leadership and strengthened personal efficacy, which will in turn improve academic achievement in their students (Beltran, 2012; Grenier, 2010; Hord, 2004, 2009; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Samson & Collins, 2012; Torff & Byrnes, 2011; Torff & Sessions, 2009).

Teachers have traditionally referred to professional development as “collaboration,” “technical coaching,” “cognitive coaching,” “peer coaching,” or “collegial peer coaching” (Dantonio, 2001, p. 15). Regardless of the phraseology, the effective professional development of teachers needs to provide continual opportunities to rotate between the roles of student and instructional expert (Gilrane et al., 2008; Hipp, Huffman, Pankake, & Oliver, 2008; Hord & Tobia, 2012; Lomos et al., 2011; Witte et al., 2010). One common form of teacher training is literacy coaching, which encourages literacy learning in teachers (Blamey et al., 2008; Cantrell & Hughes, 2008). Researchers have asserted that extended coaching expands the transferable learning and skills of teachers and improves their perspectives of their abilities to create and implement curriculum that meets all student needs (Hord, 2004, 2009).

Researchers have suggested that CFGs, or teacher conversation, is another activity of PLCs that is increasing in popularity and practice around the world because it allows teachers to engage in effective academic dialogue that motivates and creates a nonjudgmental learning environment (DuFour, 2011; Hord, 1997, 2004, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; School Reform Imitative, 2014). CFGs optimize teacher knowledge and supports discovery of what teachers need to improve student learning (Burke et al., 2011; Lewis et al., 2009; Monroe-Baillargeon & Shema, 2010; School Reform Initiative, 2014; Thanh & Mai Nguyen, 2010). In the final analysis, researchers have agreed that a teacher-driven PLC structure allows teachers to share their common vision, mission, and commitment and, in turn, improve academic achievement for their students (DuFour, 2011; Hord, 2004, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008; Hord & Tobia, 2012). The research I reviewed evidenced that the phenomenological approach was a reasonable method of study for this investigation. My review also provided a solid foundation for an exploration of teacher participation in PLCs, which meet the literacy-instruction needs of the educators, as well as the literacy learning needs of their students from families of low SES.

Section 3: Research Method

Introduction

In this study, I explored the extent to which the Hord (2004, 2009) PLC theory and the Bruner (1973) constructivism theory influenced the academic-literacy training and instructional practices of urban high school teachers who participated in a PLC. My first objective in this study was to explore and describe the essence of the experiences of the teacher population that was accountable for the academic performance of urban students of low SES including ELLs. My second objective was to identify an appropriate research-based teacher-training structure for literacy-related activities based upon the Hord and Bruner theories. I used multiple data sources, including interviews, observations, entries within teacher reflective journals, and my researcher's log, to report the lived experience of the participants accurately. During the literature review, I found that, although past researchers presented optimal professional development training for high school teachers, a scarcity of data was evident pertaining to the specific organizational structure and activities of PLCs needed by urban high school teachers to meet the varying academic challenges of their low SES students (Beltran, 2012; Cantrell et al., 2009; Grenier, 2010).

Design

I followed the phenomenological case-study tradition in my design of this study. This approach allowed discovery of the academic-literacy activities and principles in which urban high school teachers participate as members of a PLC and how this participation influences their subsequent academic-literacy instruction. Merriam (2009) and Merriam and Tisdale (2016) explained that the desire of phenomenological researchers is to understand the transitions that occur in contemporary experiences. In this study, I explored how a small sample of urban high school teachers created, implemented, and sustained a research-based PLC. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological study is best applied "to describe the meaning of a small number of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon" (p. 122). Creswell (2014), Merriam (2009), and Merriam and Tisdale (2016) asserted that what differentiates a phenomenological research approach from other traditions is that it allows direct access to the experience of a small number of participants, providing insight into the phenomenon under study through the lived experience of the participants. In this study, such a design placed me in the real-life PLC experience of the participants. This vantage point included close involvement to record, analyze, and discuss the objective observations and interviews of the PLC participants (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

Significance

At the time of my study, many high school PLC participants choose the Hord's (2004, 2009) PLC configuration, but were unable to fully implement and sustain an effective community of learners (Duncan, 2011; Robinson, 2010; Talbert, 2011). Furthermore, grants or outside sources fund PLCs that do not meet the needs of the educators or their students (Duncan, 2011). Discovering the research-based characteristics of PLC members' activities through the phenomenological approach was important for several reasons.

The phenomenological approach was important for several reasons. It allowed me to discover the essence of a specific learning community at a precise time to determine whether the implemented approach evidenced the research-based characteristics provided in Table 1 as well as Bruner's (1973) constructivism theory. I explored the influence of the PLC on the literacy instruction of the participating high school teachers. Another significant aspect of this study is how I focused on how PLC members addressed the instruction and content intended to increase ultimately the academic achievement of students from families of low SES.

The findings of this study may increase the contextual understanding of leadership in urban high school teachers, and may increase their ability to construct, implement, and sustain PLCs that will enhance student success. The findings of this study may spur further dialogue on the creation, implementation, and sustainment of PLCs that meet the literacy learning needs of urban high school teachers and their students of low SES. PLCs at the secondary-school level promote social change because they support and encourage educators to collaborate to improve their teaching (Bruner, 1973; Hord, 2004, 2009; Hord & Sommers, 2008).

The success of literacy instruction for urban high school teachers who instruct African-American and Hispanic students of low SES is also significant because it promotes social and political equity (NCLR, 2010). Huggins et al. (2011) asserted that related PLC reform "provided a different leadership model for successful . . . student learning. It has also provided the detailed changes in teachers' practices" (p. 84). To promote positive social change, I explored the strategies of PLC members whose practices and principles could break the tradition of urban high school teacher isolation, while stimulating improved student literacy achievement among students of low SES.

Purpose and Rationale

The fundamental problem of interest in this study was the lack of formal literacy preparedness and education for urban high school teachers who instruct students of low SES who lacked the literacy skills necessary to comprehend content-dominate text. As a resolution, Grenier, (2010) and Torff and Sessions (2008), improving the pedagogical practice of in-service urban high school teachers requires an understanding of the ways they plan, implement, reflect upon, and make appropriate instruction adjustments to teach their students how to read complex academic text, and therefore is the purpose of this study. Once, I established the purpose of this study, I researched several qualitative paradigms because I wanted to use the methodology that most likely would answer my research questions.

The first qualitative approach I examined was the grounded theory, which according to Creswell (2009, 2014) gathers the views of participants. I did not choose the grounded theory approach because it requires the continual comparison of 20 to 30 participants and hypothetical evaluation of different study groups to determine similarities and differences. The sample size necessary for a grounded theory design was beyond the scope needed for my exploration of PLC members' literacy practice. The grounded approach was therefore not a viable choice for this study.

The second qualitative methodology I researched was the narrative approach due to its structure and collection of descriptive participant accounts of a phenomenon. However, I did not choose this method because according to Creswell (2009, 2014), it involves solely one or two individuals telling the story of their lived experience independently, which would limit the understanding gained from a larger sample of 2 to 10 individuals who share their PLC experience. Although, this study included listening and recording the lived experiences of urban high school teachers participating in a PLC, the purpose of the research would not limit data collection to this sole activity. Therefore, because of its limited scope, I did not choose the narrative research approach.

The qualitative ethnographic research method was the third approach I considered for the design of my study. Nevertheless, Merriam (2009) stated that the ethnography is a description of a culture, which entails "an intensive and sustained immersion in the setting and the extensive data gathering necessary to produce a cultural interpretation of the phenomenon" (p. 29). As such, I determined the ethnographic approach an impractical method for this study because even though the social behavior of urban high school teachers may influence how they interact within their PLC meetings, the major intention of this study was not to provide social clarification of the cultural experiences of the participating teachers.

The final qualitative research approach I studied was the phenomenological method. Merriam (2009) and Merriam and Tisdale (2016) defined the phenomenological research tradition as a qualitative approach allowing researchers to explore the lived experience related to a phenomenon under study. As a widely used qualitative research approach within education, the phenomenological tradition supports the investigation of 2 to 10 participants effectively. Furthermore, the phenomenological design was best suited for this study because the limited sample, allowed me to explore in detail how urban high school teachers participated in PLC activities and the manner in which their learning experiences within their community influenced their learning, the learning of their fellow teachers, and the learning of their students of low SES.

Restatement of the Research Questions

, The following research questions guided this study:

1. What PLC practices do urban high school teachers employ to support the academic-literacy achievement of their students of low SES?
2. What role does administrative assistance play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers?
3. What roles do a shared mission, norms, values, and leadership play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers?

4. What roles do collaborative knowledge and use of that knowledge play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers and, in turn, their classroom instruction?

Context

This phenomenological case study's setting was an urban high school in which state certified high school teachers educated students of low SES. Furthermore, according to NYC DOE, during the 2014-2016 school year, the teachers who participated in this study along with their colleagues throughout the district adhered to Title III. Under Title III, the teachers' who participated in this study took part in high quality, continual, and vigorous professional development to improve teacher classroom instruction for students whose first language was not English (Baez, 2014). In 2010, NYC led the nation with professional development reform because, in response to the needs of the teachers and students, private, nonprofit, and public organizations established PLCs to implement continuous teacher centered literacy training to improve the academic literacy of both urban high school teachers and their students (Smith, 2010).

Bruner's (1973) constructivism theory and Hord's (2004, 2009) PLC practices and principles theory informed my study, which explored the ways urban high school teachers learned within their teacher-centered PLC activities. As Creswell (2009) and Yin (2014) recommended, I used the phenomenological method to collect data from participants' teachers' journals, interviews, observations, and my researcher's journal. My detailed descriptions of the statements and behavior of the participants evolved into the patterns and themes that captured the quintessential nature of their PLC experiences. My goal was to capture of the essence of participating urban high school teachers' experiences, as recounted by them.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Sample selection in this study adhered to strict ethical considerations. Upon receipt of Walden University IRB approval (# 04-30-14-0104524) and the NYC DOE acceptance of my proposal, I scheduled a meeting with the PLC site principal to discuss the expected involvement of the volunteer participants and the role of the principal. The meeting addressed any lack of clarity or miscommunication surrounding the research timetable, intent of the study, or role of the participants. Upon conclusion of the meeting, the PLC principal signed a written permission letter for me to conduct the study and set up a PLC meeting for me to solicit participants.

I conducted a 20-30 minute introduction to the study during a PLC meeting. The potential participants learned about this study and its purpose. All PLC members received a business card providing an e-mail address that they could contact if they wished to anonymously volunteer. I invited the PLC members to email me within 48 hours after the meeting to inform me if they were willing to participate in the research study.

At a 10-15 minute individual signing meeting that I conducted, all participants signed a consent form granting permission for the observation of their PLC meetings, for their interviews, and for the collection and analysis of their reflective journals. The consent form included signatures of the volunteer participants, the location(s), dates, and the times that the participants wished to meet for their interviews. Only the participants and I knew the location(s), dates, and times of their individual interviews. This strategy added to the confidentiality of the participants' interview statements. To ensure further confidentiality, all field notes, interview records, and journal entries identified the participants solely by random numbers. The names of the participants, the information contained in the interview transcripts, observations field notes, journal entries, and digital records were strictly confidential and only known by me. All collected data was stored in a locked file cabinet in my home office that is accessible only by me and will remain there for 5 years, at which time I will destroy all data to protect participant confidentiality.

At the conclusion and acceptance of the final study, the participants and the principal will receive copies of my study. The method of distribution of the study will occur by way of US Postal Service and signed receipts will ensure delivery to the correct persons. Per NYC DOE stipulation, the division of IRB@schools.nyc.gov will receive an electronic copy of my study.

Role of the Researcher

As researcher of this study, I possess 17 years teaching experience and 10 years background in literacy training. Since 2000, I have participated in PLCs within NYC secondary schools, colleges, and universities as a certified facilitator of the School Reform Initiative. In 2001, along with 12 other educators, I cofounded a small urban, public high school serving students of low SES within the Bronx. Due to my years of teaching experience, literacy training, and the geographic location of my school, as well as my PLC experience and facilitator training, I recognize the need to improve literacy training for urban high school teachers, especially those educating students of low SES.

As with any researcher who explores a subject-area within which he or she has expertise and involvement a potential conflict of interest exists. My knowledge of PLC communities could have influenced the data collection and analysis in this study. To overcome this concern, I did not participate in the decision-making aspects of the PLC. I served solely as an objective observer, interviewer, and data analyst. As Janesick (2011, 2016) reported, this level of separation allowed me to conduct this study in an objective manner, thereby reducing the potential for any conflicts of interest.

To secure further the level of authenticity of this study, I maintained a researcher's log, recording my activities and any corresponding thoughts. This metacognitive journal/log enabled me to analyze my own behavior as a researcher. Creswell (2009) described such a researcher's log as a method of bracketing, providing the researcher an opportunity to eliminate any conflict of interest or bias by recognizing and discounting any personal behavior and/or thoughts that could cause such conflict.

Sample Selection

I observed, on average, 10 urban high school teachers who participated in PLC activities during their professional community meetings. According to Creswell (2013), the participants in a phenomenological study represent a "narrow ranged sampling" (p. 118) that enables the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of the participants; hence, the target of up to 10 teachers limited the size of the study group. The participating educators already taught literacy skills to students of low SES and were members of a research-based literacy PLC. If more than 10 teachers had volunteered for the study, a random selection from the pool of volunteers would have occurred.

Although, the urban school system that served as the study site in this research was the same system within which I retired, the sample was not colleagues, nor was I familiar with the participants in any other way. It is noteworthy that the selection of the site for this study was within a school zone that contained the highest number of ELLs and the highest number of disabled students with Independent Educational Plans (IEPs) (NYC DOE, 2013). Additionally, school systems throughout the state of New York were participating in PLCs to improve teacher knowledge of literacy instruction and thereby increase academic achievement in their students (Robinson, 2010; Smith, 2010).

Data Collection

Procedures

The duration of this study was 2 months. PLC meetings occurred based on need. The length of each PLC meeting was approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Therefore, this study consisted of three observations of the PLC members' meetings. Precise data-collection procedures allowed objective recording of participant behavior, which resulted in rich contextual descriptions that capture the essence of the lived experiences of the teachers up to a 2-month period (Creswell, 2009).

During the 2 months at West Bronx School for Academic Success (pseudonym), PLC observations happened in the natural environment of the teachers who agreed to take part in the study. Written field notes recorded participants' activities during their PLC meetings. According to Creswell (2009, 2014) and Merriam (2009), the phenomenological research approach will effectively support the observation of PLC meetings and the recording of teacher-to-teacher interaction, instructional strategies, and discussion of lesson objectives. The Professional Learning Community Meeting Summary was the observation instrument/field note template for this study (see Appendix A). Creswell (2013) asserted that the validity of an instrument is justified if that instrument measures the concepts of the study under examination. The content of the Professional Learning Community Meeting Summary reflected the conceptual structure of Hord's (1997) characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories, which formed the theoretical framework of this study. Therefore, the Professional Learning Community Meeting Summary was a valid observation instrument that measured and standardized the "systematic process" of recording the phenomenon of this study- how urban high school teachers constructed, implemented, and sustained their research-based literacy PLC meetings (Merriam, 2009, p. 17).

The observations and teacher interviews played an important role in triangulating the data in this study. To standardize the one-on-one interview, an Interview Protocol guided my interviews with open-ended questions, while providing this study with consistency and direction (see Appendix B). Rubin and Rubin (2012) stated that an interview protocol in hand could be a helpful instrument because of its potential to standardize and direct an interview that is different from a casual conversation as the goal of an interview answers directly the research questions of a study. Creswell (2009, 2014) asserted that content validity is one method to test if an instrument is trustworthy. The content of the Interview Protocol addressed the theoretical framework of this study, which reflected Hord's (1997) characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories. Therefore, the data from Interview Protocol provided information for answering the question--how do urban high school teachers create, implement, and sustain their research-based literacy PLC meetings. To ensure further the validity of the Interview Protocol, I listened carefully and objectively, wrote all responses, and asked probing follow-up questions for deeper clarification. Additionally, follow-up questions provided interviewees with flexibility to expound upon ideas they deemed important. I audiotaped the interview with a digital recorder to record the minute details of the interview that I may not have initially perceived.

The interview data I gathered provided demographic information about the participants so readers of the study will have a sense of the backgrounds of the interviewees as well as assist in the collection the PLC experiences of the respondents from their own perspectives. To avoid interruption to the daily schedules of the teacher participants, the interviews were at the site of the PLC meetings or an alternate location more convenient to each respective interviewee.

Furthermore, according to Yin 2009, qualitative research requires data collection from various sources such as interviews, observations, and participant artifacts, which establishes "convergent lines of inquiry" (p. 115). In this study, the third source of data collection was teacher journal entries, which I triangulated with the data collected from the participant interviews and observation of PLC meetings. Creswell (2009, 2014) suggested that researchers check the validity of their instrument(s) by discussing the elements the instrument is to measure. The teacher journal questions or prompts led the participants in their individual written reflective monologues of the essence of their PLC learning experiences in relationship to Hord's (1997) characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories, and their perceptions of the influence of their learning on their practices and student outcomes. The questions or prompts originated from Hord's and Bruner's theories, therefore the Teacher Reflective Journal Entry guide provided data for the ways in which urban high school teachers participate in their research-based literacy PLC meetings. Additionally, the journal entries allowed the participants to evaluate their roles, the roles of administrators, how these roles influence teacher participation in PLC activities and the achievement of their student of low SES (see Appendix C).

To examine further the phenomenon of teacher participation in PLC activities and to record any possible bias I may have, the final form of data collection was my researcher's log. According to Creswell (2009, 2014), a researcher's log chronicles (i.e., brackets) "how time is spent… records thinking, feelings, experiences, and perceptions throughout the research process" (p. 198). Creswell, as well as Merriam and Tisdale (2016), asserted that bracketing is one of the many ways a researcher can validate the authenticity of study outcomes and is an honest narrative that clarifies researcher bias. My researcher's log entries appeared throughout the findings reported in this study to further the trustworthiness of my research and to allow reader evaluation of any of my bias.

Time and Data Management

According to Creswell (2009, 2013) and Yin (2009), a qualitative investigator spends extended time within the research environment to gain the confidence of participants and a deeper understanding of the essence of the lived experience of the participants. At the PLC site, I gathered data for this study for a period of 2 months. The PLC meetings occurred on an as-needed basis; therefore, three PLC meeting observations explored teacher-to-teacher interaction, teacher emotions, and the dialogue of teacher cooperative learning that are applicable to describing the construction, implementation, and sustainability of PLC meetings. During that time, I conducted field observations and semi structured one-on-one interviews, as well as data for triangulation from the teacher journal entries, which recorded the activities of the PLC participants (see Table 2). In accordance with Saldana's (2016) qualitative researcher procedure, I manually read, coded, and clustered the data for patterns and themes, which allowed me to become personally involved with the data. My data analysis approach allowed me to understand the details of the phenomenon under study. As Saldana stated, the uploading of the data of my study into NVivo 10 software allowed me to be engage more in "analytic reflection" of the data (p. 1) versus manual recording of data that could cause human error and misconception of the phenomenon. Therefore, the transcription of the collected raw data into the NVivo 10 software enhanced my ability to investigate accurately and critically the gathered data for deeper understanding of its meaning and relationships.

Table 2

Management of Time and Data Collection

Type of data	Collection	Management
One digitally recorded interview	2 months	Within 48 hours, manual analysis of interview notes occurred. Within 7 days, NVivo data base and manual analysis was completed. Hard copies were kept in a binder and digitally recorded data were stored in the NVivo 10 software by particpant number and the actual date and time of each interview.
Field observation notes	2-month observation	Within 48 hours of PLC observation, field notes were manually analysized. Within 7 days, NVivo data base and manual analysis was completed. Hard copies of data were stored in binders and in the NVivo with the dates, times, and assigned participant numbers.
Teacher journals entries	One-time collection	At the end of 2 months, copies of the teacher reflective journals were collected and manual analysis was conducted within 48 hours. Within 7 days, NVivo data base and manual analysis were completed. Hard copies of data were stored in binders and in the NVivo with the participant numbers and actual dates and times of entries.
Reseacher log	Throughout data collection	Within 72 hours of the manual analysis of the research, log entries were completed.

Source. Examples of authenticating the truthfulness of findings. *Research Design: Qualitative Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 2nd ed. (p. 185-188), by Creswell, J. W., 2003, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Manual transcription of the interview and observation field notes, teacher journals, and my research log and the uploading of the transcription into the NVivo 10 occurred (see Table 2). Then, I manually read the raw data five times and simultaneously highlight patterns, themes, and codes. Subsequently, I analyzed the NVivo 10 generated-data analysis, which classified the similar and/or different patterns and themes between my manual coding and NVivo 10 coding (see Table 2). Throughout the data-analysis process, all documents were stored within a locked file cabinet for which I have sole access. Five years after completion of the study, I will personally shred and dispose of all data. Additionally, I will delete the digital data gathered in the NVivo software program after five years.

Data Analysis

Data collected in this study included interviews, observations, reflective journal entries of teachers, and my researcher's log. During the data analysis, I identified and reported any discrepancies along with the related procedures pertaining to such discrepancies (see Table 3). As recommended by Rubin and Rubin (2012), I analyzed all data sources "five times for emerging themes and patterns that build detailed, understandable descriptions" (p. 211). Subsequently, I identified and critically analyzed the NVivo 10 software-generated data analysis to compare and/or contrast the patterns, themes, and codes that I gathered. At that time, I noted any similarity and differences between my manual reading of the data sources and the NVivo software's data analysis. The NVivo 10 software served as a second analyst, providing patterns, themes, and codes I could not perceive cognitively. In other words, NVivo 10 was a crosscheck of my manual coding of the patterns and themes. The NVivo 10 software provided me with an opportunity for meticulous analysis of the data categorizing and coding, which resulted in deeper "analytical reflection" (Saldana, 2009, p. 13). Such detailed data-analysis methods limited the possibility of my bias because they incorporate objective contrasting and comparing (see Table 3). I stored a hard copy of all data analyzed (i.e., both manual and via the NVivo 10 software) in binders along with the observation field notes, interview transcriptions, teacher journal entries, and my researcher's log notes. For further data security, a database within the NVivo 10 software served as a backup and was stored in a computer that I have sole possession.

Table 3

Data Analysis, Interpretation, and Representation Guide

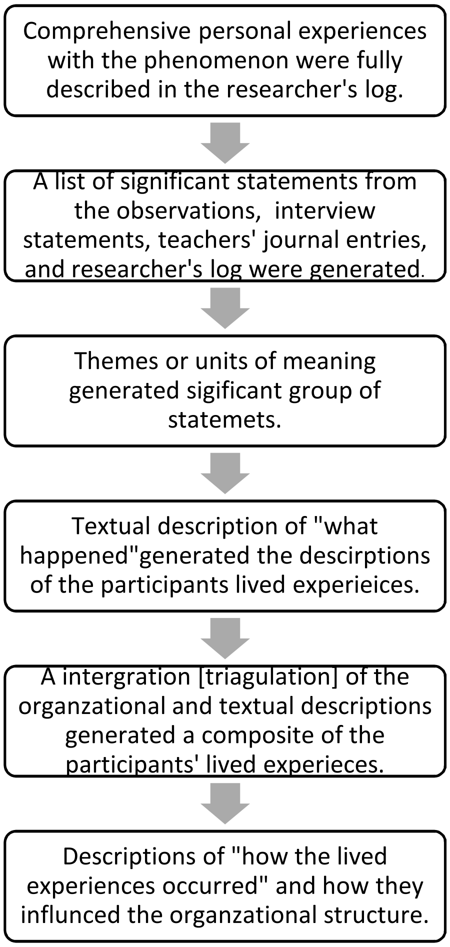
Data analysis and representation	Interview	Observation	Teacher journal entries and researcher log
Data managing	Produced and arranged files for the data collected	Produced and arranged files for data collected	Produced and arranged files for data collected
Reading, making annotated notes	Read text, made annotated notes, created initial codes, and compared and contrasted computer NVivo 10 software database to manual coding	Read text, made annotated notes, created initial codes, and compared and contrasted computer NVivo 10 software database to manual coding	Read text, created initial codes and compared and contrasted computer NVivo 10 software database and manual coding
Classifying	Identified and listed individual statements of meaning	Analyzed the regularity of themes and patterns and individual meaning	Identified and listed individual statements of meaning
Interpreting	Created a rich, descriptive text by answering the question: “What happened?”	Made inductive sense of the text by answering the question: “What happened?”	Created rich, descript ive text by answering the question” “What happened?”
	Provided a structual description by explaining activities	Provided a structural description by explaining activites	Provided a structural description of participant reflections of their experiences
	Created an account of the overall essence of the participant experience	Created an account of the overall essence of the participant experience	Created an account of the overall essence of the participant experience

(*Table continues*)

Data analysis and representation	Interview	Observation	Teacher journal entries and researcher log
Describing	Explained the essence of the participant experience	Described and drew pictures of the study site	Described the participant experiences with thick descrptions
Representing, visualizing	Used tables, figures, and narrative statements to explore the true meaning of the experience	Augmented narrative text with tables and figures	Used tables, figures, and narrative statements to explore the core of the participant experience

Source. Examples of data analysis and quality inquiry. *Quality Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (p. 142-146), by J. W. Creswell, 1998, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

An in-depth review of field notes and the conceptual observations allowed me to examine the experiences of the participants who agreed to take part in the study, as well as recognized initial codes, patterns, and themes. As noted earlier, manually reading and coding the observation field notes, interview transcription, teacher reflective journal entries, and my researcher's log for emerging patterns and themes gave me a deeper understanding of causal factors for participant engagement or lack of engagement in PLC meetings. According to Hatch (2002) and Yin (2009), the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method of data analysis is the triangulation needed to sustain trustworthiness. For this study, the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of phenomenological data analysis involved the following:



Comprehensive personal experiences with the phenomenon were fully described in the researcher's log.

A list of significant statements from the observations, interview statements, teachers' journal entries, and researcher's log were generated.

Themes or units of meaning generated sigificant group of statemets.

Textual description of "what happened"generated the descirptions of the participants lived experieices.

A intergration [triagulation] of the organzational and textual descriptions generated a composite of the participants' lived experieces.

Descriptions of "how the lived experiences occurred" and how they influnced the organzational structure.

Figure 1. Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's Method of Data Analysis

Hatch (2002) suggested that triangulation is the “verification or extension of information from other sources” (p. 92). The triangulation of the gathered data was as follows:

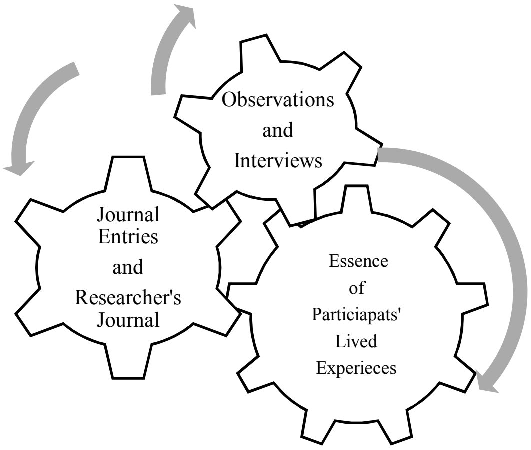

Observations
and
Interviews
Journal
Entries
and
Researcher's
Journal
Essence
of
Particiapats'
Lived
Experieces

Figure 2. Triangulation of Data

Yin (2009, 2014) advocated triangulation as an important component of qualitative research because it is the convergence of multiple data sources, which creates rival thinking and therefore, strengthens the validity and authenticity of a study. Creswell (2013) and Merriam and Tisdale (2016) asserted that triangulation is a process involving corroborating evidence from various sources that reveal a theme or perspective (see Tables 4 & 5). In my study, the teacher reflective journal entries, which represent unobtrusive triangulation data, generated open-ended questions (see Appendix C). The entries were a running stream of teacher consciousness that triangulates with the one-on-one, semi structured, open-ended interview; the observation of the PLC meetings; and my researcher’s log.

Table 4

Comparison of Quality Evidence

Accuracy strategies	Validity and reliability strategies
Triangulation	Internal validity and reliability
Member checking	Internal validity
Clarification	Researcher reflexivity
Peer debriefing	Internal-validity dependability
Rich, thick accounts	External validity and trustworthiness
Negative or discrepant data	Comparison includes other strategy
Extended time within the field	Internal validity
Peer debriefing	Audit trail for reliability
Comparison excluded	Greatest difference for external validity

Source. Methods of assessing qualitative research. *Qualitative Research: Qualitative Research in Practice: Examples for Discussion and Analysis* (p. 18-31), by S. B. Merriam and Associates (Ed.), 2002, San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Table 5

Indication of Study Trustworthiness

Strategy	Data/Process	Procedure
Triangulation	Interview PLC observation Teacher reflective journal Researcher log	Various data sources will provide mutual validation
Member checking	Transcription of all collected data	Findings distributed to participants for accuracy check
Rich, thick descriptions	Interview PLC observation Teacher reflective journal Researcher log	Descriptive narrative text generated via analytical analysis and reflection over five reviews and analytical analysis of, and reflection upon, the NVivo data.
Bias clarification	Bracketing and conceptual-framework comparison	Personal account of experiences during the phenomenon to construct understanding based upon an unbiased conceptual framework
Discrepant information	Interview PLC observation	Analytical analysis and rich narrative explanation of any discrepant information
Lengthy time within field	Prolonged time in interview and observation	2 months data collection to gain an in-depth exploration of the PLC
Peer debriefing	Individual familiar with the field of study but not associated with the research	Peer review of the findings associated with the participant experiences

Source. Examples of authenticity the truthfulness of findings. *Research Design: Qualitative Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches,* 2nd ed., (p. 196), by Creswell, J. W., 2003, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Validity and Reliability

I reviewed several data-analysis strategies ensued to ensure the trustworthiness of this study (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009, 2014). Merriam and Tisdale (2016) suggested nine fundamental strategies to safeguard internal and external validity and reliability, while Creswell (2009, 2014) presented a seven-point strategy approach to quality (see Tables 4 & 5). The evidence of quality in this study was research-based to ensure credibility of the collected data. Neither Creswell nor Merriam stressed any frequency or order of importance to the strategies; both methods mirror each other. Merriam presented a list that placed more weight on prolonged time within the field and a classification for internal validity, external validity, and reliability.

Merriam & Tisdale (2016) stated that research-based procedures safeguarded the credibility of this study and the triangulation of data further confirmed the conformability of research. To capture the essence of the teachers' PLC experiences, the interviews, observations, teacher reflective journals, and my researcher's log were manually read five times and subsequently entered into the NVivo 10 software and analyzed for any missed patterns or themes (see Table 2). Timely data analysis voided tainting or misinterpreting the experiences of the participating teachers. As Yin (2009, 2014) suggested, the four sources of data allowed an intersection of the details, evidence, and perceptions of the participants as PLC members. Manual analysis of the data revealed patterns, relationships, and themes, as well as any discrepancies led me toward a greater objective understanding of the data.

In addition, my use of the analytical analysis of the NVivo 10 software organized and classified unstructured data. By incorporating the NVivo computer software into this study, detailed analysis of the data occurred because the NVivo 10 software program coded infinite detail (Yin, 2009, 2014). Creswell (2013) opined that such technology enhances a researcher‘s knowledge of minute details that can be otherwise overlooked. Consequently, the NVivo 10 software was a research partner, which analyzed and found details, I may have missed or overlooked. The rich inductive descriptions of the data collected from the interviews, observations, teacher journal entries, and my researcher’s log gave me a complete understanding of the essence of the PLC experience (Yin, 2009, 2014). Rich descriptions conveyed teacher-to-teacher interaction, teacher emotions, and the dialogue of teacher collaboration that was applicable to describing the construction, implementation, and sustainability of PLC meetings, which will provide readers an authentic sense of the lived experience of the PLC participants (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). Participant member checking served as verification of the accuracy of the data. Aggressive recording and analysis of the data collected from all sources addressed the need for research-based dependability and the matter of qualitative over quantitative study (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009).

According to Creswell (2009), a proposal for a research study must “identify and discuss one or more [validation] strategies to check the accuracy of the findings” (p. 196). The use of Creswell’s (2009) strategies certified this trustworthiness of this research (see Table 5). Merriam and Associates (2002) stated that member checking fortified the efforts of the researcher to pull truthful themes from the collected data, which “rings true” to participant experiences and the validity of a qualitative research study (p. 26). Member checking is the opportunity for participants to check the accuracy of all information drawn from their respective interviews, observations, and reflective journals (Creswell, 2009). Within a timely manner, the participants in this study noted any desired corrections along with their initials (see Tables 4 & 5). Rich thick descriptions of all data sources substantiated the authenticity of this study (see Tables 4 & 5).

Creswell (2013) stated that such descriptions “may transport the readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences” (p. 196). He further claimed that the descriptive language provided by researchers should leave readers with a complete understanding of the phenomenon under study (see Table 5). Therefore, the rich detailed accounts of the setting, discussions, and teacher reflections in this study provided the reader with a complete understanding of the creation, implementation, and sustained experiences within a PLC of urban high school teachers who educate students of low SES.

To further the credibility of this study I bracketed my time spent, interpretations, and impressions during the observations, interviews, and within the reflective journal entries of the teachers. Hatch (2002) suggested that, when bracketed data recognizes a researcher‘s presupposition of the events during analysis is eliminated; thus, bracketing is a method of bias clarification. It is the “self-reflection [of the researcher] that establishes a clear and open narration, and resounds with readers” (Creswell, 2009, p. 196). In this study, the process examined and exposed the possibility or impossibility of research bias. Throughout the study findings, the bracketing added validity to the research. Just as unexplained bias can taint study reliability, unexplained negative or discrepant information can interfere with study authenticity. Because life is a perception from various human perspectives, Creswell suggested that discussing divergent information assists in the trustworthiness of research. The likelihood of discovering discrepant or negative cases was evident. If such data emerged within the interviews, observation, or teacher journal entries of this study, a narrative described the discrepant information.

Spending prolonged time in the field is another way a researcher can justify the authenticity of a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013; Merriam and Associates, 2002). Over two months, observation of the PLC meetings and the interviews with PLC members occurred. The teacher reflective journals, as well as my researcher's log, recorded the perceptions of the participants, as they related to events during the study. The contextual descriptions of participant experiences within the PLC secured the trustworthiness of this study.

Creswell (2009, 2014) noted that peer debriefing or review is another method of validating the accuracy of qualitative research. To meet the peer debriefing process of this study, a teacher who was not associated with the research but who had PLC experience and familiarity with the literacy training of the participating teachers was sought to examine the findings of this study (see Table 5; also see Appendix D). Prior to reviewing the research, the peer reviewer signed a Confidential Agreement (see Appendix D). To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, the peer reviewer reviewed the findings of the study and did not have access to any identifiers of the participants. The information provided to the peer review only contained the random numbers assigned to the participant by me. To ensure further the validity of this study, I examined external auditor and multisite variation. The expense of an external auditor was not feasible for me as the researcher and multisite variation would introduce too broad of a sampling for a focused exploration of teacher experiences. Additionally, due to the limitation of school-system policy, the use of various research sites was not viable for this study. I acknowledged the limitations of the research due to the single study site. The site or location limitation was acceptable because the narrow scope of phenomenological research (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). Another identified and accepted limitation was the necessary conformability of the study to the subjective responses of the participants.

To further the trustworthiness of this study, I held an informal, one-on-one discussion with each participant related to the details of this research. The discussion addressed the following:

- The purpose of the research
- Participant involvement
- The volunteer nature of participation
- Researcher commitment to confidentiality
- The member-checking process
- The manner in which participants will receive study notifications

During this initial face-to-face meeting, I asked the potential participants if they had any questions. At the conclusion of the meeting, I asked the potential participants to sign a consent form requesting their participation, and preferred locations, dates, and times for their individual interviews. Prior to each interview, I asked all participants if they have any questions. Additionally, at the time of the interviews, I reminded them that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time from the study. If the participant agreed to continue, I began the interviewing process. I informed each teacher participant that his or her interview answers and teacher reflective journals were confidential and that I was the only person who knew their content. Furthermore, I informed the participants of this study that I am the only individual with knowledge of their identities. As noted earlier, random numbers replaced participant names as another measure of confidentiality in adherence to the ethical protection of research subjects.

Another aspect of the validity of this study was the trustworthiness of the instruments I used while exploring the phenomenon in question. Creswell (2013) stated, "A sound research plan calls for discussion of the instrument… and reports reliability and validity (p. 170)." This study contains three measuring instruments that accurately assessed the phenomenon of how urban high school teachers create, implement, and sustain a research-based literacy PLC (see Appendixes A, B, and C). The content validity of the instruments was in accordance with the conceptual framework and research questions of this study. Specifically, each instrument was aligned with Hord's (1997, 2004, 2009) characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivist theories, which allowed me to discover the explicit content of Hord's and Bruner's theories, and answer the research questions. As a result, the instruments allowed me to gather "holistic" data that provided information on the essence of the participants' PLC real life experiences and their experiences in relationship to Hord's characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's constructivist theories, as well as the research questions of this study (Merriam, 2009, p. 213). The holistic, or all-inclusive, approach to data collection explored the life experiences of the participants as they participated in their PLC, which is the purpose of phenomenological qualitative research (Creswell 2009, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Tisdale, 2016).

Section 4: Results of the Study

Introduction

This study took place in a small public high school located in the West Bronx of New York City. For 2 months, I generated data for this study through observations, interviews, teacher journal entries, and my researcher's log. After I collected the data, I transcribed the data in Microsoft Word. Subsequently, the participants received their Microsoft transcribed data with instructions to read their transcripts, make any additions and/or corrections, and return their entries to me by way of email within 48 hour. As Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested, I read the transcripts five times, while color-coding for patterns and themes. Then, I uploaded the data into an NVivo 10 software program. I critically analyzed the NVivo 10 software-generated data analysis and compared the patterns, themes, and codes between the NVivo 10 analysis and my own analysis (Creswell, 2003, 2009, 2014). I then identified and reported any discrepancies along with the related procedures pertaining to such discrepancies. I then stored, in a locked file cabinet within my office, all of the information related to these data. I am the only person who has access to the key for the locked file cabinet. Five years after 2017, I will personally shred and dispose of all data and delete the digital data gathered in the NVivo 10 software program.

Context of the Study

To understand the results of this study, it is critical to understand the environment in which the PLC participants worked as colleagues. Since the new chancellor came to office under the newly elected mayor, the New York City public school system underwent massive restructuring (Decker, 2015). Decker concluded that the chancellor of New York City public schools and the governor of the State of New York were at odds concerning teacher evaluations. The chancellor went directly to teachers with her disagreement with the governor of the State of New York's implementation of another new teacher evaluation system in 2015. Decker (2015) stated that the rolling out of Common Core Standards a year earlier without giving teachers adequate training and the new teacher evaluation system made teachers throughout New York City frustrated and apprehensive about the inconsistency within the school system.

After meeting with the principal for approval to conduct this study and introducing the study to the School Improvement Team (SIT) members, two out of the six SIT members volunteered to be participants, a sample that contained an even gender spilt. To increase the number of volunteers for the study, and to maintain the anonymity of the potential volunteers, I emailed other potential volunteers twice informing them of the study's importance, how their participation in the study would improve their school's PLC meetings, and how the study might promote social change for urban high school PLCs across the nation. Some of the PLC members did not want to participate in interviews or submit teacher journal entries, but they were all willing to allow me to observe them as a group during their PLC meetings.

The PLC members conducted their meetings with a level of professionalism, which facilitated the group's efficacy. While the assistant principal—who was a teacher and facilitator of the PLC—and the principal were not participants in the study, they met with me to discuss the creation of the PLC, their support of the PLC members' principles and practices, as well as their roles in providing meaningful support to the PLC members.

The SIT originated in 2014. The shared mission, vision, values, and norms of the PLC members created a collaborative environment in which they were able to support and share their leadership to improve teacher learning and the academic achievement of their students of low SES. For this study, the selection of the SIT members occurred because overall their PLC meetings demonstrated Hord's (1997, 2004) characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories. Below are specific experiences that qualified SIT members to take part in this study:

- Met to share goals
- Worked together to construct and achieve their goals
- Assessed their progress to accomplish their goals
- Made adjustments to improve their goals
- Held themselves accountable for the desired results of their goals

When the study began, the PLC team's goal was to organize their school-wide Chancellor's Day event. Chancellor's Day was an annual New York citywide school get-acquainted event held in June for prospective students and their parents. For this project, the mission or goal of the PLC members was to create a successful Chancellor's Day event in which entering sixth- and ninth-grade students and their parents would meet their potential teachers and administrators and learn about the school's expectations of them.

Another goal of the PLC members was to have their prospective students take formative English and mathematics Common Core assessments that measured the students' literacy and numeracy abilities. The third goal of the PLC members was to share the results of the assessments with the entire faculty to improve teacher instruction as well as improve student academic literacy and numeracy success. The construction and implementation of the PLC's members' Chancellor's Day demonstrated the PLC member's engagement with their students, their students' parents, as well as authentic assessments designed to improve teacher instruction and student academic literacy and numeracy achievement, all in accordance with Hord's (2004, 2009) characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructionist theories.

The PLC members consisted of six individuals, one man and five women ranging in ages from late 20s to early 60s. All participants possessed current New York State teachers' licenses. Additionally, the PLC members each had 5 or more years teaching experience and many held special education degrees and New York State special education certification. Each PLC member had multiple degrees including master's degrees in education and other disciplines. The PLC members' previous worked experiences included college and corporate settings.

The setting of the PLC meetings was the assistant principal and guidance counselors' office, in which the PLC members sat in an informal manner. The atmosphere was light and casual. The PLC members' behavior toward one another was professional, personable, and friendly. Humor and laughter were elements the PLC members enjoyed. Often, before the meetings, the PLC members engaged in conversations in which they shared their concerns about situations they faced with their students and the students' parents. The conversations addressed the psychological, behavioral, and academic needs of their student as well as shared practices and methodology to assist and improve their students' behavioral and academic achievement. It was evident that the environment in which the PLC members worked was a place where they were comfortable meeting and sharing their ideas to improve their students' success.

The PLC meetings began at 3:30 pm and ended at 4:30 pm. The dates on which the PLC members met were flexible and based on the PLC members' completion of agenda tasks and commitment to school activities such as state testing. For their attendance at meetings, the members of the PLC received a stipend from a NYC DOE grant. The attendance for the first meeting was four out of the six PLC members, which included the volunteer participants. During the second meeting the attendance was six out of six PLC members, including the two study participants. The final PLC meeting consisted of five out of six PLC members.

Findings

The purpose of this study was to discover how urban high school teachers formed, executed, and maintained a research based literacy PLC. In this qualitative phenomenological study, I addressed the following research questions:

1. What PLC practices do urban high school teachers employ to support the academic–literacy achievement of their students of low SES?
2. What role does administrative assistance play in improving academic literacy training for teachers?
3. What roles do a shared mission, norms, values, and leadership play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers?
4. What roles do collaborative knowledge and use of that knowledge play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers, and in turn, their classroom instruction?

My analysis of each question concentrated on the four dimensions gathered from participant observations, interviews, teachers' journal entries, and my researcher's log. The four dimensions of this study are: (a) supported and shared leadership, (b) administrative support, (c) shared mission, values, and vision, and (d) collaborative knowledge.

Research Question 1

The first research question was: What PLC practices do urban high school teachers employ to support the academic literacy achievement of their students of low SES?

During an observation, the PLC members collaborated the logistics of the Chancellor’s Day event. At times, their dialogue included differences of opinions. Congenially and democratically, the PLC members listened to the different opinions, while voicing their opposition. While problem solving the logistics of the program, content, and environment of the Chancellor’s Day event, the PLC members exhibited their ability to collaborate, problem solve, and share their supported and shared leadership. For example, when deciding the logistics of the Chancellor’s Day assessment procedures, Teacher 3 went to the white board and drew a schematic of how the day’s program, environment, and services should occur. After an explanation of the drawing and group questions regarding the merits of the presented schematic, another PLC member went to the board and sketched another plan. The PLC members analyzed and discussed the merits of both ideas and came to consensus to develop a plan that best suited the needs of the visiting students, their assessment procedures, the students’ parents, and the roles of the school-wide teachers participating in the Chancellor’s Day event.

Another example of the PLC members’ collective constructive leadership efforts was evident during the observation of a conversation concerning the number of outstanding special education student Individual Educational Programs (IEPs), which were due in less than 3 weeks. Four out of six of the PLC members used school provided PCs and laptops to look up data pertaining to the number of outstanding IEPs that needed to be completed as well as the names of a few students.

Once the research analysis was completed, the licensed special education PLC members began a dialogue concerning how the current IEP process took place with the parents and outside support staff. The discussion for the general education teachers was a professional development of the IEP process and its ineffectiveness in relationship to specific students, student behavior, and the students' parents' participation. The PLC members decided to work together to complete the outstanding IEPs.

Additionally, the PLC members agreed unanimously that a new protocol was necessary to improve the special education students' learning and behavior. The PLC members' shared reflective inquiry and the dialogue resulted in their deciding to add an analysis and resolution to the current outdated IEP process and evaluation system to next year's agenda. The PLC members concurred that the new protocol would include special education students attending IEP meetings so they would know their targeted academic literacy and behavioral goals. In addition, the PLC members collectively agreed to investigate how to implement periodic IEP meetings throughout the year to help the special education students improve their academic literacy learning and social behavior incrementally, which was an example of the PLC members' collective learning applications.

The interview question pertaining to the PLC members' collective learning applications was "What are the collective learning application(s) within your PLC? Teacher 3 stated, "We go to work on something and we tend to get down to agreeing after expressing our disagreements." Teacher 2 reiterated the idea that the shared leadership and collective learning process of the PLC members consisted of "… decision-making that required 'argument' with majority consent." Teacher 2 continued by saying, "Though we may disagree, we support one another by our discussions."

The teachers' journal question that provided me with information pertaining to the practices the PLC members used to enhance their students' academic literacy learning was "Do your PLC practices enhance student learning? Can you provide an example?" Teacher 2 stated,

> I have several examples of how our practices enhance student-learning schoolwide. We turnkey [share] various instructional information we share in our PLC meetings with other teachers in our school wide professional development meetings. Specifically, teachers and guidance share ideas and materials with the other teachers. We show them [our colleagues] how to incorporate the information we learn in our PLC meetings at our school wide professional development meetings. Another example was the time when the special education teachers in our PLC meeting shared such things as the graduation criteria and explained its modification for special education students.

Teacher 3 noted the following:

> We try to make sure all students are able to work efficiently but specifically the special education students. One of our practice occurred in the beginning of the year, we did a lot of online testing in English and mathematics. We shared our findings [as a group and as individuals] with our colleagues' throughout the school so they would have the data necessary to plan authentic lessons that met the student needs.

Teacher 2 noted in the teacher journal that the central mission of the PLC is "The kids [who] are number one!" Teacher 3 stated, "… in general we support all our students' learning." In the teacher's journal, Teacher 3 noted, "[I find] ... having an opportunity to interact with the other teachers is energizing. The teachers have varied experiences and they are very well trained."

In my researcher's log, I noted that the participants agreed that their shared governance, vision, values, and mission connected them because they believed in and trusted that their capabilities and the capabilities of their colleagues would affect the procedures in their school positively and specifically the academic success of their students of low SES. I wrote further that the PLC members' practices constructed their difficult decision-making dialogues and research-based assessments, which allowed them to learn in an environment in which they shared their leadership to benefit their colleagues' instruction and their prospective students' learning. Additionally, in my researcher's log, I wrote that the PLC member's mode of operation was different from my other experiences as a facilitator, observer, and participant of PLC activities. Their seamless shared leadership puzzled me at first because it went counter to what I had known to occur in PLC meetings. It was as if the PLC member's mission, value, norm, and vision unified them. The PLC members volunteering to create formative assessments and to supply their fellow faculty members with authentic pedagogy designed by research to meet the academic literacy needs of their students of low SES was another situation foreign to me.

During uncomfortable discussions, the PLC members remained professional and worked through their discomfort for the common good of their students and follow teachers, which I had not seen before either. Furthermore, the PLC members' behavior caused me to question what was it that made them operate collaboratively without a sense of selfishness. Despite my unfamiliarity with the behavior and the practices of the PLC members, I remained open to observing, listening, recording objectively the accounts of their lived experiences. To remain impartial, I asked myself repeatedly the question, "What happened," which caused me to align my perspective towards objectivity. To understand how the administrative assistance contributed to the creation, implementation, and sustainability of urban high school PLC members' practices, research question two sought to understand how PLC members' perceived the role(s) their administrators played that supported their PLC meetings, their colleagues' academic literacy, and the academic success of their students of low SES.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: What role does administrative assistance play in improving academic literacy training for teachers?

During the PLC members' observations, the administrative representative was an assistant principal who was a teacher and the PLC's facilitator. As facilitator, the assistant principal verbally presented and guided the PLC members' agenda items in a modulated calm yet assertive tone and demonstrated the demeanor of a PLC team member who was a nonjudgmental active participant in the process of shared supportive leadership, reflective inquiry, problem solving, and accountability.

Additionally, the facilitator encouraged the PLC members to use research as the foundation of discussions and resolutions. The allocation of time for on the spot research gave the PLC members the opportunity to learn, share, and problem solve in a stress free environment. The protocol the facilitator used unified the PLC members' collaboration, which encouraged inquiry, problem-solving conversations, and authentic [research-based] pedagogy that supplied the PLC members with sound methodology to work towards improving teacher training and student achievement. To unify further the academic literacy learning of the PLC members, the PLC facilitator used two norms- one at the beginning of each meeting and one at the end of each meeting.

The norms or unifying activities that occurred during the PLC meetings were the words that began and ended each meeting. At the beginning of each meeting, the facilitator asked the member to contribute their "Updates" of which they responded voluntarily. Their updates ranged from tasks they were working on or completed to student issues that would enhance their colleagues' practices across disciplines. At the end of each meeting, the facilitator asked, “What’s next?” At that time, the PLC participants volunteered to discuss their individual and group tasks and their proposed upcoming agenda activities for the next meeting.

While talking with the principal, I learned that the principle of the school established the terms “Updates” and “What’s next” so to have universal norms or behavior and language spoken at all faculty and team meetings. Such common language created a uniformity that formulated the universal ideology of the school.

During another conversation with the principal, he stated that he chooses not to get too involved with the efforts of the SIT because his philosophy was that the members were capable individuals whose mission, values, vision were to improve the academic achievement of the teachers and thus to improve student achievement and the school climate. He stated further that the assistant principal was a trained facilitator. The principal’s level of trust in the members of the PLC and willingness to relinquish his authority was also evident when I spoke with the assistant principal. The assistant principal stated that she was solely in charge of the PLC’s practices and principles, which had proven to have improved teacher academic literacy preparedness and student academic achievement. Figure 1 is an illustration of the PLC’s relationship with the principal and its contribution to teacher academic literacy training and student achievement.

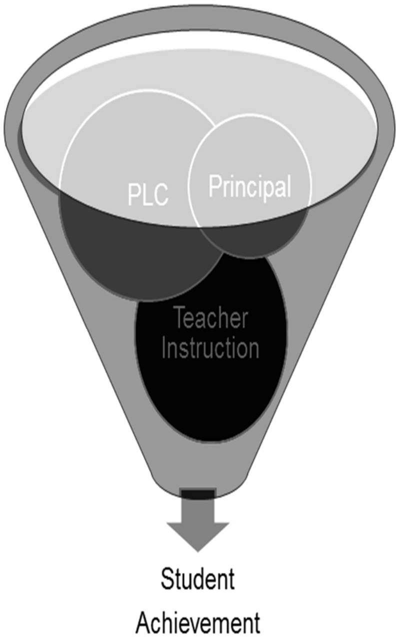


Figure 3. Administration: Improving Academic Literacy Training for Teachers

To discover further, the roles the school's principal played in supporting teacher academic literacy training, during interviews, the participants answered the question, "How does administration support the conditions (procedures and structure) of your PLC academic literacy training?" Teacher 2 and 3 interview responses focused on out of school training. Techer 2 stated, "The administration is supportive by giving us opportunities to attend professional development. He [the principal] supports and is willing to let us go to various training." Teacher 3 stated, "The principal sets up outside text and numeracy Common Core training. I like it because we meet with teachers from other schools, which gives me a broad base of ideas to use in my classroom."

The teachers' journal question that addressed the issue of the administrative roles and their influence on teacher literacy training was "How does the administrator assist in improving your academic learning (i.e. scheduling, materials, professional development support, and any other assist that helps your learn)? Give an example." In response to the teachers' journal question, Teacher 3 stated, “They [the administrators] give us time to work, which motivates you to get our stuff done on time.” Teacher 3 made note that time allocation was a key factor in being engaged in PLC activities. Teacher 2 stated, “The administrative support is in the learning environment in which we work. It allows us to receive training along with our colleagues.”

> I noted in my researcher’s log that the facilitator never hesitated to supply her colleagues with convenient meeting times, an informal meeting location, access to technology, supplies, and staff assistance needed to organize and execute the Chancellor’s Day event and other projects. Additionally, I noted that the facilitator was a thoughtful, patient, and focused individual who created a learning environment that encouraged equal interaction and candidness among all PLC members. I also noted that the facilitator efficiently used time and respected every ones need to have direction from the bottom up versus the common restrictive top down totalitarian use of authority. The facilitator’s behavior was to listen and address each PLC member respectfully, which encouraged supportive and shared leadership and collective learning. Additionally, I observed that the facilitator monitored the PLC meeting so the members were able to give and take feedback with what seemed to be an acknowledgment that their mission, values, vision, and norms were bigger than their individual emotions.

Furthermore, I noted in my researcher’s log that the principal’s trust in the assistant principal was unique because within all the years, I have been an educator; I never worked with a principal so trusting of his or her staff. The principal’s willingness to meet me was another point that I found different and refreshing. Moreover, in my researcher’s log, I mentioned that the participants agreed that the administration of the school encouraged professional development, which they appreciated. I also noted or bracketed my opinions so not to allow them to interfere with my gathering of the data. Again, I asked the question, "What happened" so to remain objective in gathering data. To report, the PLC members' practices and principles, research question three investigated the PLC members shared mission, values, and vision and how leadership improve the academic literacy training for teachers.

Research Question 3

The third research question was: What roles do shared mission, values, vision, and leadership play in improving academic literacy training for teachers?

When being observed, the PLC members took part in their activities harmoniously as if they knew each other rather well and enjoyed being in each other's company. Throughout the PLC members' discussions, they shared snacks and laughed. The comfortable interaction between the PLC members "broke the ice" during their difficult conversations. The PLC members did not mention their shared mission, values, or vision. Their actions expressed their quest, shared behavior, ethics, visualization of their mission, and governance. It appeared that everyone understood how to accomplish their task(s) and went about getting the various tasks or goals accomplished voluntarily. To accomplish and refine tasks, each PLC member was willing to discover the vision they shared that all students were capable to learn and that their mission was to provide their colleagues with the research-based data to meet the needs of their students of low SES.

During the interview, Teacher 3 explained the role of group dynamics and its influence on the PLC members' shared mission, values, vision, and leadership play in improving academic literacy training for teachers, by saying, "… we are a small school so we all know each other pretty well. We can relate to each other well… We've worked together before. We don't need warm-up exercises (chuckle). Everyone knows our goals.

When asked the interview question, how does your PLC share its values and vision, Teacher 3 said,

> Initially, the main-focus [mission] was to implement special education policy. As time transpired, we expanded our franchise voluntarily to support all students. You could say we expanded our mission to support all our students' learning. Our values and vision remained the same. We work on a product as a team… Everyone here has shared goals.

Teacher 2 stated during the interview that

> An example of how we share our vision is when we created and shared the Positive Behavior Intervention System (PBIS) with the other teachers. At our SIT meetings, we planned a reward system [PBIS] for students' positive performance. Once we fine-tuned the system, we shared the system with the entire staff at our whole school professional development meeting.

An additional example of how the PLC members used research and data analysis to support its shared mission, vision, and values occurred at their last meeting of the school year. Prior to the PLC's end of year meeting, one of the PLC members visited sample classrooms to observe the ways teachers used the PBIS method of student reward. When debriefing the members of the PLC, their colleague reported that one teacher was using PBIS in the classrooms. The PLC member further stated that other teachers felt the reward system was not necessary or inappropriate, and therefore, they chose not to use it, while the one teacher who used it in the classroom found the PBIS project helpful in instituting classroom management and student learning.

At the conclusion of the PLC member's data analysis presentation, one member suggested that the PLC members should reexamine the trustworthiness of the PBIS process and if the evaluation proved the validity of the PBIS program then the team should fine-tune it and create methods of assisting their colleagues in implementing the PBIS. Another PLC member suggested that the group should perhaps make the PBIS program a schoolwide process versus a classroom activity, which would increase overall student achievement, school pride, and improve the overall school climate. The PLC members agreed with the final comment and decided to add the idea to their next year's agenda.

In my researcher's log, I noted that the PLC members' confidence in each other allowed them to reflect upon their implementation of their mission to improve student behavioral and academic achievement. Additionally, I wrote that the PLC members used qualitative research to examine their PBIS program, and therefore, accomplished their mission, vision, and value to improve teacher ability to improve classroom management, which had the potential of increasing student academic achievement. To remain objective, I asked the question, "What happened?" Finally, research 4 explored how PLC members used collaborative knowledge and how the use that knowledge plays in improving academic-literacy training for teachers and in turn, their teacher classroom instruction.

Research Question 4

The fourth research question was: What roles do collaborative knowledge and use of that knowledge play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers, and in turn, their classroom instruction?

While observing the final PLC meeting, I noted that the group participated in a debriefing of their yearly activities. Additionally, I wrote that PLC members' reflection upon their implementation of the Chancellor's Day English and mathematic assessments was a method of sharing their collaborative skills. Prior to the meeting, the English and mathematic teachers graded the assessments given to their perspective students and a colleague who served as consultant to the PLC members created an excel matrix that contained the data research of their perspective students' scores. The English and mathematic PLC members discussed how they presented the student test scores or authentic pedagogy at their schoolwide meeting. The English and mathematic PLC members explained that the matrix was created to give their colleagues the opportunity to create lessons that met their students' specific needs. Furthermore, the mathematic and English teachers stated that the assessments showed evidence that the majority of the students were below grade level in English and mathematics. This meeting led to the PLC reflecting upon how to reconfigure the mathematics program next year in order to improve the students' numeracy skills. Teacher 3 stated, "We must find methods of incorporating basic mathematical skills into our mathematic Common Core curriculum. The current curriculum teaches the students how to fail and that is not good." The PLC members agreed that Teacher 3's statements were worthy of examination.

The interview question that reported how the participants utilized collaborative knowledge to enhance their Common Core Standards training and classroom practices was "How does your learning from participation in the PLC influence your implementation of the Common Core Standards?"

Teacher 2 stated the following:

> Our [PLC's] focus is not us studying and implementing the Common Core Standards in our classrooms. As the SIT, our goal was to assist our fellow colleagues in other areas, for example, the Chancellor's Day in which perspective students and their parents came to the school to be introduced to our policies and to be tested. The English and math

> teachers used the Common Core Standards to design their assessments but that is about the extent of our [our PLC's] use the Common Core Standards.

Teacher 3 responded to the interview question by saying,

> It [the Common Core] was used to assemble our tests because we wanted to know what the kids know to give them a good start. So naturally, the Common Core was the set of standards we looked at for our assessments.

The teachers' journal entry question that explored the influence of collaborative knowledge and Common Core Standards on teachers' literacy training and instructional practices was "What roles do collaborative knowledge and/or use of the Common Core Standards play in improving your literacy training and instruction?" Teacher 2 stated, "The SIT doesn't focus on our Common Core training so I don't get my Common Core professional development from the SIT."

Teacher 3 responded by saying,

> In the SIT, we do not spend a lot of time discussing the Common Core because, though we use it in designing our assessments, we don't use the Common Core as part of our SIT training. I've been a member of an interschool Common Core group for years. I don't think the SIT helps me with my Common Core training because I do so much outside of school training pertaining to the Common Core.

In my researcher's log, I wrote that the Common Core collective knowledge of the PLC members did not occur during their PLC meetings because they received their training in school and out-of-school from other professional development sources. Additionally, I noted in my researcher's log that the English and mathematic teachers used their prior knowledge to create their Common Core based assessments and that their distribution of the data they gathered were their method of shared collaborative knowledge. Moreover, I noted that the structure of the PLC members' practices were the catalyst that stimulated schoolwide collaborative knowledge and use of that knowledge stimulated academic-literacy training for teachers, and in turn, their classroom instruction.

Discrepant Cases

The experiences of the activities and the concepts from the perspectives of the participants' coincided with Hord's (1997, 20014) characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories. Furthermore, the participants agreed favorably with their PLC practices and principles. This study's data did not contradict the patterns that emerged from the data analysis.

Evidence of Quality

The foundation of the trustworthiness of the study and the essence of the participants' experiences were evident in the triangulation of the data from my observation field notes, interviewee responses, teacher reflective journal entries, and my researcher's log notes. The utilization of triangulation ensured the accuracy of the study's findings. To capture and validate the essence of the teachers' PLC experiences, I read the data transcripts manually five times and uploaded them into the NVivo 10 software program. NVivo assisted in analyzing for overlooked patterns and themes. Thick rich descriptions of data and relevant quotes supported the findings and my biases; analysis of possible discrepant information, member checking, and peer debriefing were executed.

The bracketing of this phenomenological research study clarified my biases because my data collection and analysis refrained from judgments as I kept an open mind. In my researcher's log, I wrote my ideas; my time spent, my opinions, and acknowledged my prejudices that were present, while using reflexivity for clarification. During my observations and interviews, I was conscious not to interject my thoughts and feelings. The readers of this study can decide if they are able to transfer the findings of this study to other settings based on the description of the research methodology used.

Thick and rich descriptive text of the study's research approaches and findings evolved by me asking the question, "What happened?" The utilization of participants' direct quotes enhanced the understanding of the essence of the participants' lived experiences during their participation in their PLC. This method of data analysis provided a structural description, which explained the essence of the teachers' shared activities. A detailed account of the organization and sorting of the observations, interviews, teacher's reflective journal entries, and my researcher's log transcripts' codes and patterns resulted in the detailed account of data, which created a concrete foundation to ensure the external validity and trustworthiness of the findings. As previously stated, there were experiences the participants shared but expressed the meaning of those experiences similarly and differently.

As Creswell (2014) recommended, I used the internal validity strategy "member-checking" gave me the opportunity to validate whether the study's emergent themes were accurate representations of the participants' PLC experiences (p. 201). At the conclusion of data analysis and themes acknowledged, the participants received an emailed a copy of a portion of the data analysis. Giving the participants the opportunity to express their feelings on the correctness of the findings provided me with necessary feedback, which strengthened the validity of the study. To further the trustworthiness and dependability of this study, an external validity check was conducted by a teacher who is familiar with PLC activities but not a member of the study.

In Section 4, I reported the qualitative findings associated with this research study. In Section 5, I give an overview of this study by reviewing the research questions and issues addressed. I also include a summary of the findings, the interpretation of this study's findings, implication of social change, recommendations for action, recommendations for further study, and a reflection of my experiences along with the research process.

Section 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The United States public education system has received criticism from legislators, parents, and the general public for not giving America's children the skills needed to participate effectively in the global economy (Alliance, 2009; Anyon, 2014). The academic literacy skills of African-American and Hispanic-American students of low SES are generally 1 or more years behind the literacy skills of their European-American and Asian-American counterparts (Beltran, 2012). With such gaps, urban teachers can no longer teach in isolation (Helman, & Roshelm, 2015; Hord, 2004; 2009; Meirink, Imants, Meijer, & Verloop, 2010; Senge 1990; Stewart, 2014). In an effort to improve public education, school reform advocates created collegial learning, which is also referred to as collegial or team coaching, CFGs, and PLCs (Czaplicki, 2012; Fahey, 2011; Hord, 2004, 2009; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; School Reform Initiative, 2014).

Public school districts across the United States implement PLCs as forms of professional development for teachers (DuFour, 2014; DuFour, 2011; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Tschannen-Moran, & Gareis, 2015). Despite the evidence that PLCs improve teacher and student learning, researchers reported that urban high school teachers' PLCs are more likely to fail due to the attitudes of the participants and inappropriate infrastructural elements (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2015; Hord, 1997; Torff, 2016; Torff & Brynes, 2011; Torff & Sessions, 2009). By conducting observations and interviews, as well as gathering data from teacher journal entries and maintaining a researcher's log, I sought to discover the essence of urban high school teachers' experiences as they created, implemented, and sustained a research-based literacy-focused PLC.

To gather data that examined the physical and human capital elements of a PLC, I used the following research questions to explore how urban high school teachers in one New York City public school built, executed, and supported their PLC:

1. What PLC practices do urban high school teachers employ to support the academic literacy achievement of their students of low SES?
2. What role does administrative assistance play in improving academic literacy training for teachers?
3. What roles do a shared mission, norms, values, and leadership play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers?
4. What roles do collaborative knowledge and use of that knowledge play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers, and in turn, their classroom instruction?

In this chapter, I examine the research questions of the study and data gathered from observations, interviews, teachers' journal entries, and my research journal. This chapter also includes a summary of the research, which includes an interpretation of the findings and application of the data. In addition, implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for further study are included in this chapter. In the final part of this chapter, I examine and reflect upon my experiences as the researcher of this study.

Interpretation of Findings

Observations, interviews, teacher reflective journals-entries, and my researcher's log were the sources of data that documented the practices and principles of urban high school teachers who established, put into practice, and supported a PLC. The triangulation of the data showed that the urban high school PLC members who took part in this study used the tenets and methods of Hord's (1994, 2004) five characteristic of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories. Specifically, the analysis of the data sources showed that the practices, or methods, of the PLC members included computer-generated research/action research, data analysis, shared reflective inquiry dialogues, democratic problem-solving conversations, and decision-making. Additionally, the PLC members' principles, or tenets, encompassed their self-governance, shared and supportive leadership, mission, vision, norms, and values. Furthermore, the data revealed that administrators' support influenced the outcomes of the PLC members' practices and principles.

Using this study's four research questions, I examined how urban high school teachers who took part in PLC meetings used their shared practices and principles to influence teacher quality and student academic achievement. The four research questions that I posed explored the ways in which urban high school teachers constructed, put into operation, and maintained a PLC. These questions were: (a) What PLC practices do urban high school teachers employ to support the academic literacy achievement of their students of low SES? (b) What role does administrative assistance play in improving academic literacy training for teachers? (c) What roles do a shared mission, norms, values, and leadership play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers? and, (d) What roles do collaborative knowledge and use of that knowledge play in improving academic-literacy training for teachers, and in turn, their classroom instruction? After the analysis of the four dimensions of the four research questions, I was able to determine the specific practices and principles used by members of the urban high school PLC member who participated in this study.

I found that both participants had positive opinions of their PLC activities. The data sources yielded important information, which indicated that neither participant had significant differences in their perceptions of their PLC practices and principles. Both PLC members reported that their group constructed supportive and shared leadership, and the practices implemented by administrators supplied the teachers with resources that reinforced their PLC's shared and supportive leadership, mission, vision, and values. Additionally, both PLC members suggested that their shared mission, values, vision and collaborative knowledge also attributed to the effectiveness of their PLC's methods and tenets. Moreover, while analyzing the descriptive data, I was able to determine the specific principles and practices used by urban high school teachers who took part in PLC activities.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 pertained to the participating urban high school teachers PLC practices or activities. Additionally, question 1 explored how the PLC members' practices supported teacher quality and the academic literacy achievement of their students of low SES. Observations, interview Question 9, teacher journal-entry Question 3, and my researcher's log reported that both participants' perceptions of their group's practices influenced their skills, abilities, vision, and values. Additionally, the data indicated that the participants responded favorably to their ability to conduct difficult yet productive conversations that escalated their problem solving and decision-making skills, which they may not been able to do alone. The data showed that the participants were positive about their inquiry and reflective conversations because their dialogue gave them the ability to share personal practices as well as construct ideas and actions that improved teacher and student learning. In addition, the participants agreed that their students were the motivation for their supportive and shared leadership, mission, values, and vision and that they believed that all students could learn. As shown in Section 4, another practice the participants agreed upon was that their practice of shared governance and supportive leadership influenced their belief in their capabilities and the capabilities of their colleagues to affect positive teacher learning and academic success of their students of low SES.

Research Question 2

Question 2 pertained to the roles school administrators play in improving the academic literacy training for teachers. Observations, Interview question 13, teacher reflective Journal-Entry Number 4, and my researcher's log answered Research Question 2. Both teachers who took part in the study agreed that the role of administrators was influential in the success of their PLC meetings. The data reported that the PLC members had favorable perceptions of the administrators' roles in their PLC meetings' effectiveness because the administrators supplied the PLC members with the supportive conditions that helped them and their fellow PLC members to actualize their vision of academic and social reform within their school. Additionally, the participants had favorable perceptions about the way the administration encouraged them and their PLC members to use data research and analysis to meet the specific needs of their colleagues and students' learning. Furthermore, the participants had positive responses to the way in which the administration's representative facilitated their meetings and allowed constructive conversations and feedback. In addition, the participants approved how the administration supported teachers attending in school and out-of-school professional development and their use of their learned knowledge to improve instruction and student learning.

Research Question 3

To explore how urban high school teachers conducted professional development, in Question 3; I examined how their supportive and shared leadership, mission, vision, norms, and values influenced the productivity of the PLC members' activities. Both participants agreed that they and their PLC members had a complex committed relationship that allowed them to have mutual governance, which gave them confidence in one another to be able to promote educational and social change within their school. The participants attributed the successful dynamics of their PLC members' relationship to the PLC members' commitment to their students' academic success, which unified the group's joint shared and supportive leadership, mission, values, and vision. Additionally, the participants were confident about their team's mission, values, and vision because of their use of constructive authentic pedagogy and reflection upon their activities, which fine-tuned their goals to improve teacher and student learning.

Research Question 4

Finally, responses to Interview Question 12, teacher's journal entry Question 4, my observations, and my research journal answered Research Question 4, allowed me to discover the collaborative knowledge and the use of that knowledge to improve the academic-literacy training for teachers, and in turn, their classroom instruction. This question connected the way in which the PLC team members worked collectively to seek knowledge and how they used that knowledge to improve teacher and student learning. The PLC members' responses indicated that they had positive reactions to their collaborative knowledge. The PLC members stated that their collective Common Core learning or training did not always occur within their PLC meetings. The participants combined their prior collective learning and their PLC collaborative knowledge in their problem solving and decision making processes. I noted further in my researcher's log that the PLC members' Common Core informative assessments were examples of how they used their collective knowledge to create authentic pedagogy to improve teachers' practices and the literacy skills of their students of low SES. Therefore, I concluded that the PLC members' gathered and analyzed data of their perspective students' assessments were the procedures used by CFGs and mentors. Hence, PLC members' collaboration and sharing of their findings with their fellow colleagues gave their colleagues the information or statistical data needed to design lessons to improve their students' learning, which Bruner (1973) and Hord (1997, 2004) suggested are the tenets of a PLC's characteristics and constructivism theories.

For nearly 20 years, studies have examined how PLC members' practices and principles influenced teacher instruction and improved students' learning (Hord, 1997; Hord, 2004; Samson, & Collins, 2014; Torff, 2016). However, few studies have investigated the sociological construct between urban high school teachers and their understanding of the essence of their PLC experiences (Torff, 2016; Torff & Byrnes, 2011; Torff & Sessions, 2008). I pursued this phenomenological research study to add to the body of knowledge of the sociological construction of urban high teacher's supportive and shared leadership or governance, which Bruner (1973), Hord (1997, 2004, 2009), and Gamoran, Secada, and Marrett (2000) stated was one element that influenced the effectiveness of PLC members' activities.

To report the participants' perceptions and lived experiences, I relied on the rich descriptive data, which included the PLC members' direct quotations from their interview questions, teacher journal-entries, observations, and my researcher's log. To further the examination of the phenomena in question, I examined the correlation between the PLC members' lived experiences and the conceptual frameworks of Hord's (1997, 2004, 2009) five characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theory.

From this study, I learned that the PLC members' physical and social environment supported their shared practices and principles. The principal at the research site school took on the role of a silent background supporter who provided the PLC members with a meeting location, common meeting time, staff and faculty support, and materials that reinforced the PLC members' activities. The principal's actions coincided with Hord's (1997) suggestion that "A school whose staff is learning together and participating in decisions about its operation requires a campus administrator who can let go of power… and thereby share the leadership of the school" (p. 17). Hord further suggested that for a community of PLC learners to make decisions about their school's procedures, the PLC members need a principal who lets go of top down authoritarian management and shares the guidance of the school, while providing the PLC members with the infrastructural protocol. In addition to supporting the PLC members' meetings, the principal at the site appointed an assistant principal to the role of facilitator. The facilitator had total governance over the PLC members' meetings and activities, which enhanced the participants' perception of their ability to institute reform in their school.

I learned that the PLC facilitator's actions or social behavior were in accordance to Killion's (2013) suggestion that a PLC facilitator should be an unobtrusive participant who provides an environment in which the teachers would feel socially comfortable and confident enough to collaborate. In addition, I learned that the facilitator's actions were also in line with Killion and Bruner's (1973) suggestion that a well-organized facilitator is a timekeeper who makes sure PLC meetings work efficiently, institutes protocols within meetings in which the participants have a sense of organization, and gives every member of the PLC the opportunities to take part in inquiry. The way the facilitator encouraged divergent dialogue/inquiry gave the PLC members a sense of confidence to share their leadership, which coincided with their shared practices and principles to improve their learning, the learning of their colleagues and students of low SES.

In addition, I learned that not only does a PLC facilitator influence the day-to-day operation of the PLC members' meeting and activities, he or she affects the sustainability of the PLC members' principles and practices. During the PLC members' last meeting of the year, they reflected upon their activities and made suggestions of ways to sustain the PLC activities in the coming year. Under the guidance of the facilitator, the PLC members constructed their reflection of their experiences that was consistent with their lived experiences as PLC members. Therefore, as in accordance with Hord (2004, 2009) and Bruner (1973), the PLC members established a problem solving platform of dialogue and reflection that sustained the principles and practice of their PLC meetings.

Hord (1997) furthered Bruner's construct by suggesting that effective PLC meetings consist of a community of learners who continuously reflect on their activities to assess if they met their mission, vision, values, and norms. Specifically, the PLC members' conversations about the strengths and weaknesses of the PBIS program gave them the opportunity to reflect upon how to improve the PBIS program during the coming school year, while supporting their shared leadership, vision, values, norms, and mission to improve their school climate. Their metacognitive inquiry and learning during the PLC members' reflective planning meeting included dynamic engagement, deliberation, and application that met the distinct needs of the PLC participants' shared leadership, norms, mission, values, and vision to improve their learning, the learning of their fellow teachers, and the learning of their students of low SES. Bruner (1973), Hord (2004, 2009), Hord and Sommers (2008), Hord and Tobia (2012), Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012), and Motoko and Liang (2016) shared the idea that cohesive and focused conversations advanced PLC members' learning, the learning of their colleagues, and their students, which occurred among the PLC members. Therefore, I learned the physical and social environment of PLC meetings influenced PLC members' efficacy.

In contrast to Torff and Session's (2008, 2009) suggestion that urban high school's professional training was less effective than the professional development of their suburban counterparts, the urban high school PLC members who took part in this study engaged their PLC meetings' principles in ways that influenced the efficacy of the PLC member's practices positively. Therefore, the urban high school teachers' PLC participation in their shared leadership, norms, values, and vision effectively implemented, created, and sustained their mission to improve teacher instruction and student academic literacy skills. Furthermore, the PLC participants' favorable response to their meetings and facilitator were in line with Torff and Byrnes' (2011) and CETT's (2012) suggestion that for an adult to learn he or she must believe that what is being learned is relevant to his or her life and the world in which he or she lives.

I also learned that another influence on the PLC members' shared leadership during their PLC meetings evolved from each participant's commitment and actively taking part in assignments and conversations, which Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012) and Bruner (1973) stated as a learning condition necessary for adult learners to commit to learning. Knowles (1989) suggested that an adult's incentive to learn is by extrinsic motivation (a better job or approval from others); the more salient motivation for adults is intrinsic (self-confidence, accountability, or job self-actualization). The PLC members' behavior was salient motivated because they kept their practices and principles accountable while maintaining a sense of self-confidence as individuals. Therefore, PLC participating members' motivation self-actualized their mission to enhance their learning and their colleagues' literacy instruction by way of authentic pedagogy.

The PLC members who participated in this study worked under the central tenant of an effective PLC, which is in agreement with Hord's (2004, 2009) ideology that effective PLC members share the common vision that all students are teachable and capable of learning. Based on that common ground, the PLC members shared leadership as CFG members. In addition, the PLC members were their school's literacy coaches who shared their authentic pedagogy with their fellow teachers.

Additionally, the site principal's supportive leadership influenced the PLC members' mission. The principal provided the infrastructure protocol of shared time to meet, reoccurring meeting location, materials, and supportive staff; the PLC members needed to improve their learning and to improve the literacy instruction of their fellow colleagues. Also, by providing PLC meeting members with stipends NYC DOE also exhibited support for the participants' vision to improve the literacy instruction of their colleagues and the literacy skills of their students' of low SES. Furthermore, the principal and NYC DOE's supportive conditions encouraged and enabled the PLC members to sustain their interest in their principles and practices, which Beltran (2012), Bruner (1973), CETT (2012); Hord (2004, 2009), and Knowles (1989) suggested as a fundamental factor in PLC governance and sustainability.

Moreover, the PLC members' success as equal decision-makers and their efficacy unified their value that each individual receive respect despite the uneasiness of complex decision-making dialogues, which Bruner (1973) suggested lead to the PLC members making meaning from information and their experiences. In concordance with Bruner (1973) and Hord (2004, 2009), the PLC members' conviction reinforced the effectiveness they had when they shared their best practices and reflected upon their activities among themselves as well as with their other colleagues. Therefore, the PLC members who took part in this study used Hord's (1997, 2004, 2009) five characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories and constructed, applied, and maintained their PLC meetings' shared leadership, mission, norm, values, and vision. Moreover, as adult learners, the PLC members were able to augment their learning while promoting the learning among their colleagues and students of low SES.

Implications for Social Change

My exploration of an urban high school's creation, development, and sustainability of a PLC may contribute to social change by adding to the body of knowledge pertaining to urban high school PLC ideologies and activities. The results of this study may provide school districts and administrators with guidelines for how to standardize PLC practices and principles as well as methods of giving teachers' leadership roles in establishing, maintaining, and sustaining effective PLC practices and principles that encourage teacher engagement. Additionally, the results of this study offer awareness to researchers into other areas of research needed to add to the understanding of the culture, structure, roles, and responsibilities within an urban high school PLC. Furthermore, results of this study may influence teacher quality, and the use of authentic pedagogy to improve the academic literacy learning of urban high school student who are of low SES.

In addition, the findings suggested that teachers are the human capital that plays a central role in the effectiveness of their supportive and shared leadership, which exist because of PLC members' collective shared vision, values, norms, and mission. Additionally, results of this study indicated that when a PLC's members' values, norms, and mission are well defined and adhered to the purpose of improving teacher quality, the PLC members meet their vision to improve student achievement. And therefore, results of this study may assist researchers and educators in identifying further the scope to which Hord's (1997, 2004, 2009) five characteristics of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories exist within urban high schools and how PLC members create, implement, and sustain research based literacy practices and principles across the nation.

Recommendations for Action

The findings of this study have resulted in the following personal, local, and national recommendations for action:

Personal Actions

1. As a regular guest on the Maggie Linton Show (Sirius XM Radio Urban View 126), I will discuss with other guests the crisis in American education and the role of teacher training.
2. In an effort to add to the body of knowledge pertaining to urban high school PLC members' practices and principles, I will write, submit, and publish the findings of this study in scholarly journals.
3. To broaden further the body of knowledge about urban high school PLC members, I will conduct further qualitative research to discover how urban high school teachers across the nation create, implement, and sustain their PLC practices and principles.
4. As a businessperson, I will create a multicultural non-profit educational organization that will research and assist urban high schools in constructing, executing, and maintaining teacher constructed literacy PLCs.
5. At national and international conferences and seminars, I will appear as a speaker and panelist to explain the structure, importance, and need for teacher constructed PLCs in urban high schools.

Local and National Actions

1. Urban school districts should establish reference websites and blogs that assist administrators and teachers, while they are creating, implementing, and sustain their PLCs.
2. Urban school districts should train urban teachers and administrators how to reform their school to become successful PLC members.
3. To improve shared leadership skills, urban high school teachers and administrators should undergo facilitator training.
4. The school administrators and PLC members should undergo training in ways to empower teachers into decision-making and leadership roles.
5. School administrators and teachers should define their schools' mission in ways that allows teachers to create, implement, and sustain their shared and supportive leadership, mission, vision, values, and norms to improve teacher quality and student learning.
6. The urban high school administrators should put in place the appropriate infrastructure [time and location] that allows teachers to meet continuously to develop programs to improve teacher quality and student learning.
7. School districts' budgets should include stipends for teachers who take part in PLCs activities.
8. To produce authentic [research-based] pedagogy, urban high school administrators should supply teachers with technology to gather data for analyze.

9. During their PLC meetings, urban high school teachers should share ways that allow them to discuss their visions of what they want their school to be and share their vision with their entire learning community.
10. Urban high schools should have a PLC consultant and researcher to assist teachers and administrators in the creation, implementation, and sustainability of PLC's activities.
11. At intervals, urban high school teachers should assess their PLC practices and principles and fine-tune those dimensions to improve teacher and student learning.
12. Throughout the year, urban high school PLCs should conducted debriefing meetings to evaluate the successes and/or failures of their school reform activities.

Recommendations for Further Study

Recommendations for further study are as follows:

1. Reproduce this study in urban high schools across the country to explore the creation, implementation, and sustainability of various forms of PLCs.
2. Conduct research that examines how the culture of urban high schools influence the inner workings of PLCs.
3. Research should be organized that examines how urban high school administrations across the country influence teacher participation in PLCs.
4. Longitudinal phenomenological studies should explore the long-term effects of urban high schools' PLCs' practices and principles, the influence on school climate, teacher preparedness, and student literacy academic achievement.

Summary

In this integrated phenomenological study I explored the essence of a South Bronx, NY high school PLC, its members' mission, values, vision, norms, and shared and supported leadership, perceptions, and practices. Counter to the majority of urban school PLC research, the WBASA SIT was a research-based PLC that utilized Hord's (2004, 2009) characteristic of a PLC and Bruner's (1973) constructivism theories. As an educator with over 20 years-experience as a literacy specialist who took part in PLC training, participation, and facilitation, I came to this study with bias but because of the PLC members' collaboration I was impressed with their outcomes and the administration's support to improve teacher practices and student literacy achievement. During the PLC members' self-governing meetings, they incorporated me in their discussions and welcomed future contributions from me, which I limited so not to sway the PLC members' process. WABAS's PLC members accepted me, which gave me insight into how a successful learning community learns from each of its members.

Initially, when I began my research, I expected to witness uncooperative practices that would limit the success of the school's mission. Despite my bias, I worked diligently to return to the question "What happened?" That approach to my research diminished my anticipated expectation and allowed me to discover the behavior and structure of the PLC members objectively. Furthermore, I began to understand how the PLC's members shared and supportive leadership, mission, values, vision, and norms gave them the ability to create, implement, and sustain their PLC practices effectively.

I recognized that the PLC members were a research-based community of learners whose mission was to improve teacher training and the learning of their low SES students. Additionally, I began to discover the PLC members' values, vision, norms, and school mission guided the shared and supported leadership of the PLC members' democratic process of reflective inquiry, which included group conversations that consisted of problem-solving and self-governing decision-making. Their behavior and practices broke the isolationist approach to professional development I thought I would experience.

Therefore, from my research, I learned that the general knowledge concerning urban high schools greatly indicated an unjustified stereotype, which deserved reexamination. As far back as 1987, Hord, Rutherford, Huling-Austin, and Hall suggested that the "theory and the validity of [high school] folklore must be questioned" (p. 62). Consequently, because results of this study showed that urban high school teachers effectively broke the myth of urban high school teachers' ineffective PLC practices more qualitative descriptive research needed to explore the essence of the successful experiences urban teachers and administrators undergo while taking part in PLC activities. When researchers, policy makers on the local and national levels, and the urban high school teachers and on campus administrators understand and construct effective approaches to PLC activities that meet the needs of teachers and students, then and only then will major reforms stimulate meaningful social change within the urban public educational system of America.

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Appendix A: Professional Learning Community Meeting Summary

Date: _________________ Participant Number: ________ Setting: _______________

____

	Examples of Hord's (1997) Characteristics of a PLC	ACTIONS/PROCEDURES/DISCUSSIONS Examples of Bruner's (1973) Constructivist Theory
1	Shared and Supported Leadership	
2	Shared Mission, Values &Vision	
3	Collective Learning & Learning Application	
4	Shared Personal Practice	
5	Support Conditions	
6	Use of Common Core Standards	

Notes:

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

1. What is your age?
2. What educational degrees have you earned?
3. How many years have you been teaching?
4. What grade(s) do you teach?
5. What is the subject area of your instruction?
6. How many years teaching experience do you have in your subject area?
7. What are the shared and supportive leadership practices within your PLC?
8. How does your PLC share its values and vision?
9. What are the collective learning application(s) within your PLC?
10. How does your PLC share personal practice?
11. How does your PLC use supportive conditions (i.e., relationships and structures)?
12. How does your learning from participation in the PLC influence your implementation of the Common Core Standards?
13. How does administration support the conditions (procedures and structure) of your academic literacy training?

All participation is confidential. Thank you for taking the time to participate. Throughout the research, you will receive copies of the interview transcripts and the meaning drawn from them to review for accuracy. If you would like to discuss or change any aspect of the transcripts, please contact me. If I do not hear from you within 48 hours of your receipt of the transcripts, I will consider that to be your approval to use the noted interpretation within the research.

Appendix C: Teacher Reflective Journal-Entry Guide

1. What roles do shared norms, values, and supportive leadership play in improving your literacy training? Explain each characteristic.
2. What roles do collaborative knowledge and/or use of the Common Core Standards play in improving your literacy training and instruction?
3. Do your PLC practices enhance student learning? Can you provide an example?
4. How does the administrator assist in improving your academic learning (i.e. scheduling, materials, professional development support, and any other assist that helps your learn)? Give an example.

Appendix D: Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Name of Signer: ______________________________________

> During the course of my activity in reviewing this research: _______________________ I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participants.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement, I acknowledge and agree that:

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

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

Signature: ____ Date: __________