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Walden University

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Jerry Kociuruba, Jr.

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Review Committee
Dr. Antoinette Myers, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Marilyn Robb, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Kathleen Montgomery, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2017

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities and Their Impact on School Culture

by

Jerry P. Kociuruba Jr., M.Ed.

MA, Lesley University, 2006

BS, Limestone College, 2003

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2017

Abstract

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are a group of educators working collaboratively to improve student achievement and expand the pedagogy of the individual as well as the group. Studies on PLCs, grounded by the social constructivism theory of Vygotsky, Bandura, and Wenger, have found that collaboration and collegiality foster a positive school climate. This case study explored the perspectives of PLC participants at a suburban high school on the impact of their PLC on the school's culture. Ten teacher participants with at least 2 years of experience at the research site were individually interviewed, and 5 observations of content PLC meetings were conducted. Data were open coded to determine emergent trends. The analysis resulted in thick, rich descriptions of the experiences of the teacher participants. The findings suggested that the school's ineffective use of PLCs negatively affected its culture due to a lack of established norms, collaboration, communication, and accountability. A professional learning opportunity was developed focusing on effective PLC usage and the impact on school culture. The study supports positive social change by providing school leaders and PLC participants at the study site with information to sustain PLCs in a manner that promotes a positive school climate that could lead to a more efficient, consistent learning environment that benefits students.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family. Without all your support, this would not have been possible. First, I would thank my parents for instilling in me the work ethic and the value of an education that I have today that allowed for me to complete this study. Second, I would like to thank my beautiful and loving wife, Devan, for without your support and encouragement through this journey I would not have completed this project study. In addition, I would like to dedicate this paper to my three boys, Aiden, Jude, and Shane; you guys are my catalyst in life and without the motivation to make a better life for you three, I would not have ventured down this doctoral path. Just remember boys that "with perseverance and the willingness to learn, anything is possible in your future". Lastly, I would like to thank my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, for without him nothing is possible. God is good.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

The current trend for schools to achieve academically is with the use of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) (Watson, 2014). Childs, Burn, and McNicholl (2013) defined school culture as a "set of meanings that include norms, values, traditions, beliefs and myths transmitted historically, even though it may be perceived differently by school members" (p. 37). Usage of PLCs can impact a school's culture by shifting a school's attention from subject matter to the student, which can adjust educator practices (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010).

In South Carolina, schools face the challenge of showing significant improvement in student learning under the current and increasing accountability standards from both the federal and state departments of education. Attempting to meet all the federal and state-mandated accountability methods can affect student learning as well as the culture in a school. A current trend to facilitate improved student learning is to utilize PLCs or communities of practice (Cherkowski, 2012; Kagle, 2014; Watson, 2014). Implementing a PLC in an ineffective or unproductive manner can affect a learning community or school's culture (Cosner, 2012).

DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) portray PLCs as a set of "teachers committed to collaborating in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to accomplish improved outcomes for the students they serve with continuous, job-

embedded learning for teachers" (p. 18). In addition, PLCs have been found to be a process that allows teachers to evaluate expectations and beliefs through reflection and dialogue with other PLC members that leads to transformational learning (McCommish & Parsons, 2013). PLCs can be considered a paradigm shift away from traditional, isolationist teaching practices to more collaborative, team-oriented teaching practices that focus on the student in a way that helps shape a school's culture (Tam, 2015). With the use of PLCs, a school can create an environment that leads to a sustainable change in school culture, which can affect student achievement or results (Teague & Anfara, 2012).

The gap in practice is that a large, suburban high school implements PLCs in a way that has not created a culture of collaboration and shared beliefs, values, and norms (Turan & Bektas, 2013). Per the implementation of PLCs, as described by Leane (2014), schools are having a discrepancy between PLC planning and practice. An example of inconsistency is a PLC becomes a gripe session for teachers instead of a meeting with a productive result that affects student learning (McComish & Parsons, 2013). Implementing PLCs in an ineffective manner allows for the creation of obstructions for successful development (Dever & Lash, 2013). PLCs not implemented or maintained in an effective manner tend to impact a school negatively. In this study, I examined the use of PLCs in one secondary school where PLCs have not resulted in greater teacher communication and collaboration, which may be contributing to lower teacher and student satisfaction and teacher retention.

In XYZ High School (pseudonym), PLCs are the organizational model used to improve instructional learning. PLCs in XYZ High School may have contributed to a decline in the learning environment due to the school culture created with their use. Communication and collaboration exist sporadically within the individual or subject-oriented PLCs, but as a whole school, these two facets of effective learning environments do not translate school-wide (Teacher, Personal Communication, December 6, 2015). The use of PLCs in XYZ High School is more of a directive rather than a way of thinking as a school to improve the pedagogy of the school through collaboration and efficient communication. The school does not follow a set school culture consisting of shared norms, values, beliefs, and mission as well as creating an environment enveloped in effective communication and collaboration (Teacher, Personal Communication, December 1, 2015). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) found teachers do not view PLCs favorably when PLCs are implemented in a heavy-handed manner by the administration.

The learning environment at XYZ High School has declined in recent years as verified by the teacher survey used for determining state report cards (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). There is more of a climate of classroom isolation rather than a collaborative venture among professional educators. Perhaps the environment of classroom isolation has led to a lack of trust among teachers and administrations (Cranston, 2011). The lack of relational trust may have resulted in a learning environment lacking in common ground, actually shared ideas and teaching strategies,

and a sense of working together to offer the best education possible for students (Adams, 2009).

Although few researchers have described the experiences of teachers and the implementation of PLCs, there is inadequate research on the perceptions of teachers in PLCs and their impacts on a school's culture (Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2015; Hallinger & Heck, 2010). For this reason, the study provided an opportunity to explore how PLCs impact a school's culture from the perspective of PLC participants. The collected data for the study may benefit XYZ High School by providing insight into how teachers perceive a school's culture with the use of PLCs and how their implementation leads to these effects.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

At XYZ High School, teachers are required to meet weekly in their PLCs or discipline teams. With the use of PLCs, it is expected that the school would run more efficiently, but despite above-average test scores and state rankings, the school suffers from a culture crisis. Research suggests PLCs should make a difference to a school's culture with an emphasis on collaboration, rigorous inquiry, trust, and all or each factor must be present while having a focus on the content leads to positive changes to a school's learning environment (Brodie, 2013). It is evident the culture of the school has not improved based on informal observations as well as conversations with teachers (Teacher, personal communication, December 1, 2015). A lack of communication and

collaboration amongst teachers outside of subject-based PLCs has led to the decrease in the school culture.

In addition to these informal observations and conversations, the teacher satisfaction survey used for the state accountability report card showed a decline in teacher satisfaction and teacher retention. The state report card showed XYZ High School having a teacher satisfaction survey with a learning environment approval of 98.6% in 2010 and dropping to a measure of 81% for the 2015 school year (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). In addition, the teachers return rate decreased from 89.4% in 2012 to 85.1% in 2015, which shows a higher rate of teachers leaving the school, which leads to more teachers inserted into a school that utilizes PLCs without any direction (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). Another data point from the same set of surveys was the percent of teachers satisfied with the social and physical environment, which went from a measure of 98.6% satisfied in 2010 to 85% in 2015 (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). The decline in satisfaction rate shows a decrease in approval with the social and physical environment of XYZ High School that points to an issue with the culture of the school. Not only did the surveys show more teachers being dissatisfied with the learning and social environment of the school but the students who took a similar survey did display parallel results. The juniors or third-year students in 2011 were 87.4% satisfied with the learning environment while the students in 2015 have a measure of 75% satisfied (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015). Not only do the informal observations and communications show an issue of school

culture at XYZ High School but also the public data used to reflect and confirm that there is a problem with the culture of the school.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Level

By utilizing a qualitative case study, I examined teachers' perceptions of how PLC usage impacts a school's culture. School culture is described as the shared norms, beliefs, practices, and values that drive the operation of a school (Turan & Bektas, 2013). The use of PLCs in schools that focus solely on student results may create an environment where the long-term sustainment of the PLCs does not occur due to a lack of a positive or effective school culture (Leane, 2014). If a school's established culture is one of dysfunction, isolation, and a lack of shared vision and beliefs, the learning environment is going to change in a way that decreases the effectiveness of each educator and produces lackluster student results (Hulme, Cracknell, & Owens, 2009). In many schools today, teachers are arranged "on paper" to be working in a PLC, but there ends up being an inconsistency between the literature and practice of PLCs (Dever & Lash, 2013). Because of PLCs not being adequately implemented or sustained, a gap of practice presents itself where a school's PLC is not only becoming a misuse of time and resources but can affect the school's overall culture and learning environment (Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014). In addition to many studies looking at how PLCs affect student achievement (DuFour et al., 2008), few studies examine how teachers perceive the overall use of PLCs and what, if any, impact they have on a school's culture.

Rationale

The rationale for the study was derived from the information from the locality and a review of the literature. Teachers involved in PLCs have the potential to establish a school culture that maintains the success of a school by establishing shared values, goals, and mission (Teague & Anfara, 2012). The study's approach was qualitative in nature with the use of a case study to explore the insights of teachers with the use of PLCs impact on school's culture. The collection of the data for this research study attempted to cultivate an understanding of how PLCs impact the culture of a school. The study addressed a local problem of effectively using PLCs and understanding how their implementation has an influence on a school's culture.

Information discovered through the study can increase the effectiveness of PLCs within XYZ High School. Due to a decline in the teacher and student learning environment, survey scores on the State Report Card for XYZ High School, this study explored the school's PLC usage and its impact on the school's culture. Furthermore, several teachers have voiced through informal discussions that the culture and learning environment of the school have degraded in the past five years (Teacher, Personal Communication, December 3, 2015). Through these conversations, it was evident that effective collaboration and communication are not consistent among the PLCs and the school as a whole (Teacher, Personal Communication, December 4, 2015). The purpose of the study was to examine the understanding of how Professional Learning Communities impact a school's culture from the perspective of PLC teachers.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used throughout the research and are defined for the project study.

Communities of Practice: Groups of people who share a common goal, awareness, or passion for something they do or learn how to do it better as they regularly work together (Wenger, 1998).

Professional Development: The total of prescribed and everyday learning practiced and subjected to by the teacher in a captivating learning environment under conditions of difficult and complex transformation (Fullan, 1995).

Professional Learning Communities (PLC): A group of educators working collaboratively to improve student achievement and expand the pedagogy of the individual as well as the group (DuFour et al., 2008).

School Culture: A set of norms, practices, values, and beliefs that drive the functioning of a school (Turan & Bektas, 2013).

Significance of the Study

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to examine the understanding of how PLCs impact a school's culture from the perspective of PLC teachers. Teachers involved in PLCs have the potential to establish a school culture that maintains the success of a school established shared values, goals, and mission (Teague & Anfara, 2012). The study's approach was qualitative in nature with the use of a case study to explore the insights of teachers on the use of PLCs and its impact on a school's culture.

Through the collection of the data, this research study attempted to cultivate an understanding of how Professional Learning Communities impact the culture of a school. The study addressed a local problem of effectively using PLCs, and the implementation of PLCs has an impact upon a school's culture. Findings from the study allowed a suburban high school, which utilized PLCs as an organizational model for curriculum/school teams, to understand teacher perceptions of PLCs and their impact on a school's culture. Understanding the educator's perceptions of how a PLC impacts a school culture allowed for the examination of the positives and shortfalls of the program.

The project study was significant because it addressed an under-researched area in a large, suburban high school related to PLC usage and its impact on a school's culture. With the use of PLCs, a school can change its shared values, norms, values, and beliefs (Kirkpatrick & Johnson, 2014). In addition, the study allowed for a school to operate in a more efficient manner with the usage of PLCs to create a learning environment that promotes an enhanced collaboration and communication amongst teachers. By gathering a better understanding of the teachers' perceptions of the PLCs at XYZ High School, the school can adjust the ways the PLCs operate to create a better learning environment for all students. This learning environment wa accomplished by examining the understandings of how PLCs impact a school's culture from the perspective of PLC teachers can create social change in a secondary school by allowing the school to understand further the impact PLCs have in their schools. By establishing schools with

positive school cultures with the use of PLCs, schools can reach many students since changing a school's culture will affect more students at a time (Eaker & Keating, 2012).

The study provided an avenue for a sample of teachers to voice their perception of the school's PLCs and to shed some light on the possible link to the school's culture. The examination of the teachers' perceptions of PLCs helped with evaluating and creating an opportunity to nurture a school culture that fosters learning for all students with the use of PLCs. By providing this opportunity, the PLC members and the administration delved into what is working and what needs to be re-evaluated regarding PLC implementation and sustainment. In addition, by adjusting the methods the PLCS are implemented and sustained will allow for the school's leadership team to make any adjustment to the functioning of the school and reduce the amount of teacher turnover.

The study impacted the school members by gathering the feedback of the study participants and meeting observations, which can be used to evaluate the PLCs at XYZ High School. By evaluating the PLCs at XYZ High School, the teachers and school leaders can create a working and learning environment with the use of PLCs to maintain a staff that creates a learning environment conducive to learning for all students. In addition, the community can be impacted by the creation of a learning environment produced using PLCs, which can lead to students who better achieve and are ready for the 21st Century workplace.

Research Question(s)

The qualitative study utilized a case study design to understand the perceptions of teachers as it pertains to PLCs and their impact on school culture. Case study research examines a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context. Qualitative studies seek to answer questions on how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. PLCs have been evidenced through various articles, studies, and books to alter a school's culture from one focused on the teaching of the content or subject area to one that is focused on learning experiences and successes of students. Despite the interest in the topic of PLCs and school culture, there is limited scholarly work on the perceptions of teachers or PLC members perceived impact PLCs have on a school's culture when PLCs are utilized as the organizational model. The gap in the literature directed the research study, which was guided by a primary research question: How does the use of Professional Learning Communities, as perceived by teachers, impact the culture in secondary schools? The research questions for this study were:

RQ1. What aspects of school culture are impacted by the use of Professional Learning Communities?

RQ2. How do secondary school teachers perceive the impact school leadership responsibilities have on a school's culture while participating in a PLC?

These questions guided a qualitative case study designed to increase the understanding the impact PLCs have on a school's culture as perceived by teachers

involved in PLC at XYZ High School. Interviews were the primary method of data collection using a semi-structured interview protocol consisting of the demographic survey, teachers' perceptions of PLC usage, and the impact PLCs have on a school's culture. The interview also consisted of questions that dealt with the perceived impact of the administration or leadership role with PLCs and how they impacted the school's culture.

Review of the Literature

The purpose of the qualitative case study was to examine the understanding of how PLCs impact a school's culture from the perspective of PLC participants. This section includes a literature review containing: conceptual framework, components and characteristics of PLCs, benefits of PLCs, descriptions, and impacts of school culture, and how PLCs interact and impact school culture. The review of literature for this study included an assortment of sources to reach a level of saturation on the topic of PLC usage and school culture. Search terms such as *communities of practice, social learning, school culture, Professional Learning Communities, organizational culture, learning communities, learning environments* and *teacher learning* aided in finding peer-reviewed journals, websites, and dissertations. Peer-reviewed journal articles were found using the following databases: EBSCO Publishing, Google Scholar, Sage, ProQuest Central, Academic Search Premier, Academic Search Complete and Educational Research Information Center (ERIC).

Conceptual Framework

The literature review exposed a variety of concepts that explored how adults learn and how school culture impacts learning. Using theories from Bandura, Vygotsky, and Wenger, researchers have created theories that describe how adults acquire knowledge, in particular through a social environment. Adding to these theories, this study was also guided by Hord's (1997) and DuFour et al.'s (2008) principles of PLCs.

A Professional Learning Community is an organizational model where teachers can learn from one another to increase the effectiveness of an educator's pedagogy. A PLC is social in nature, and the concept of a PLC connects right to the social learning theory as described by Bandura (1977). Bandura (1997) described learning in a social setting as:

> Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous if people had to rely solely on the effects of their actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions, this coded information serves as a guide for action (p. 22).

Bandura's (1997) theory emphasized that learning occurs primarily by observation, and most human behaviors are a learned behavior by observing and modeling. Because PLCs are social in nature, their use leads to an emphasis on cooperative learning amongst PLC members. In addition to Bandura's (1997) theory, Vygotsky's (1978) concept of a zone of proximal development leads to an emphasis on

cooperative learning that attaches to PLCs. Using peer collaboration sets up an environment where members are motivated to learn by being encouraged and supported (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vygotsky's (1978) theories of development assert that learning exists as a social activity and learning is more efficient and influenced by people that are more proficient when working collaboratively. The zone of proximal development describes interactions among people as well as an explanation of why PLCs can be an effective organizational model. Vygotsky (1978) contended social interactions aided in the learning of individuals by setting up an environment where tasks unable to be accomplished individually can be achieved with the use of peer learning. This facet of Vygotsky's (1978) theory helped explain how peers should challenge and encourage each other to have meaningful collaboration and successes.

The final theory to ground the study was Wenger's (2000) social learning theory. Per Wenger's (2000) social learning theory, learning is both social and dynamic. Wenger (2000) stressed that a community of practice is needed to achieve learning in a manner that lends itself to the building and transference of knowledge. In addition, Wenger (1998) understood that learning did not take place in a separate, closed community of practice but rather members and their ideas moved between them. The author stressed, "New experiences, contexts, conversations and relationships necessitate reframing previous understandings, as the meaningfulness of our engagement in the world is not a state of affairs, but a continual process of renewed negotiation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 54).

Within one of these communities of practice, a major task is found to reinforce the identities of participants by integrating previous learning experiences and existing understandings into the traditions of the group (Williams, Ritter, & Bullock, 2012). Within communities of practice, members focus on shared teaching difficulties as they develop common definitions to a problem and its solution leading to the construction of explanations and negotiations about the cause of an issue and the cooperatively negotiate the course of future actions (Lampert, 2012). By negotiating within a community of practice, each member can share their experiences and engage in making meaningful solutions (Wenger, 1998).

Among working cooperatively to solve a problem, communities of practice have been found to share initiative as agreed upon by its participants, provide reciprocal engagement, and share a collection of ideas and practices that colleagues have cultivated over a period of time (Wenger, 1998). Consistent with Wenger's belief, Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize that participants of a community of practice be engaged in an array of interactions over time influencing the community's culture and will strive to cultivate around things that are important to the group. Smith (2003) explains that for a community of practice to operate effectively, it necessitates a creation and transfer of a collective set of beliefs, responsibilities, and understandings while cultivating collaborative resources such as tools, routines, documents. Communities of practice as designated by Lave and Wenger (1991) are an efficient method for groups to manage

problems and to communicate knowledge to solutions outside of the traditional structural boundaries (Smith, 2003).

DuFour et al. (2008) describe PLCs as "teachers committed to collaborating in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to accomplish improved outcomes for the students they serve with continuous, job-embedded learning for teachers" (p. 18). In addition, PLCs are effective when an environment of collaboration is created that allows teachers to work together as well as adopt mutual responsibility for the education of all students with a PLC (DuFour et al., 2008). DuFour and Fullan (2014) referred to PLCs as a vehicle to transform a school from a philosophy of seclusion to a culture of collaboration to increase student achievement. Impacting the culture of a school using PLCs needs to come through an intentional process where a school goes through a cultural shift that involves the critical reflection of the assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations, and habits that make up the norms of a school (DuFour et al., 2008). In addition, DuFour et al. (2008) stress that changing the culture in the schools using PLCs must occur through a purposeful process that must look at the daily challenges of a school to impact the culture since a school culture is dynamic rather than a static entity. The study utilized DuFour et al.'s concepts of PLCs to examine the impact that PLCs have on a school's culture by considering the norms of the school's PLCs and what impact the PLCs have on culture based on the perceptions of teachers involved in PLCs.

When teachers come together as a PLC, as expressed by Hord (1997), they can work collaboratively to inquire analytically about their practice or pedagogy resulting in

new understandings. Teachers need to engage in schoolwide collegial activities that have students' learning as their focus (Hord, 2007). Hord and Sommers (2008) supports Hord's (1997) ideas of PLCs when PLCs allow professionals to work collegially and collectively to improve student learning with the process of continuous cooperative learning. Hord (2007) surmised that PLCs to be functional and make a difference in students' learning environment, PLCs must have shared leadership, promote collective inquiry, staff involvement in creating a shared vision and values, and share personal practices. In addition, supportive conditions, as described by Hord (2007), must be provided in a manner that builds the capacity of not only the group of teachers but the individual as well. In addition, Hord described the use of PLCs to "create a culture of high intellectual quality by utilizing action research with the use of continuous interactions to assimilate new ideas and practices (p. 45). Fostering collaboration in a way that produces meaningful student results is the mainstay of Hord's concepts of PLCs. In this study, the concepts of Hord's definition of PLCs with the use collegiality and collaboration directed the research considering how teachers perceive the use of PLCs, regarding collaboration and collegiality, and the impact it had on a school's culture.

Professional Learning Communities

Eaker and Keating (2012) described PLCs as an organizational model to allow for successful public education reform. Song (2012) stated a PLC is an environment "that allows for teacher empowerment and collaboration with a focus on student learning" (p.91.). Per Botha (2012), a PLC allows teachers to develop teams focusing on student

learning by rethinking pedagogy, building new classroom roles for learners, strengthening student outcome expectations, and create an environment, where "teaching occurs in ways that have never been taught before" (p.399). Lippy and Zamora (2012) provided an alternate definition of a PLC by describing them as a chance to influence student learning through collaboration on pedagogy, leadership, and collective decision-making. PLCs are an organizational model that can transform a school's culture and learning environment by changing values, beliefs, relationships, professional practices, and leadership patterns and influences (Hairon & Dimmock, 2012). PLCs are a way of collaborating to reach the overall goal of educating all students (Thessin, 2015). Professional Learning Communities, as described by various researchers, is an organizational method that provides an opportunity for educators to effectively collaborate and communicate in a manner that utilizes common practices and norms that yield positive student results.

Kagle (2014) contended that effectively run PLCs allow for an initiation of teacher identity and implant new norms among a group of teachers to serve students better. Additionally, PLCs provide chances for teachers to engage in collaboration to identify student needs, adjust instruction, and achieve collective goals by coming to a common understanding of practices (Thessin, 2015). Linder, Post, and Calabrese (2012) clarified the function of a PLC as means to enhance collaboration in a learning community to provide professional and student growth by using collective inquiry and reflection. Brodie (2013) described highly effective PLCs as learning communities that

can connect students, teachers, and content to establish an environment that creates the greatest amount of student learning. Kennedy et al. (2011) promoted the purpose of using PLCs to allow teachers to discover research questions based on student information, discuss various methods to address students' needs, and conducting collective action research. Furthermore, teachers who work in innovative learning environments had more enriched careers in education and professional growth while having a positive impact on their students (Gray, Mitchell, & Tarter, 2014). Professional Learning Communities allow teachers to serve their students better when the PLC members commit to effective collaboration while using collective inquiry and action research to discover the most effective means for promoting a learning environment that impacts all students positively.

A common characteristic of PLCs that effectively function is that teachers move from an isolationist environment to one full of collaboration amongst fellow team members to meet a common goal (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). DuFour et al. (2008) described the main characteristics of PLCs as "having a shared mission, vision, and goals; creating a collaborative culture with a focus on learning; focusing on collective inquiry into best practices and current research; learning by doing; committing to continuous improvement; and being results oriented" (p. 15-17). Within PLCs, teachers work together to find the most effective methods for creating learning situations that allow students the opportunity to learn best. Another characteristic of PLCs is they create peer accountability by working in teams by reporting student progress, needs, and

interventions to focus on the establishment of the most effective learning environment possible (Richmond & Manokore, 2010). PLCs provide an opportunity for a school to create a collaborative culture with peer accountability to focus on a school's goals of educating their students to the best of their ability.

Benefits of Professional Learning Communities

PLCs have generally been regarded as an instrument of promoting substantial reform in schools by going from a culture of isolationism to a culture where teachers are working in teams to discover the most effective ways to enhance student learning (DuFour et al., 2008; Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2015; Watson, 2014). The use of PLCs allows for the development of leaders not only within a curriculum team but also in the school as a whole (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2013). Thus, a school will run more efficiently with the use of distributed leadership where collaboration and consultation occur rather than autocratic decisions delivered to staffs (Bezzina, 2008; DuFour & Fullan, 2013). In a study by Peppers (2015), it was found that PLC usage in a school allows for continuous learning, exploration of the learning and pedagogy, collaboration, empowerment of the faculty and teacher leaders, and the fostering of effective leadership. Incorporating PLCs into a school's structure allows for transformational learning, which leads to teachers examining their practice by understanding alternative perspectives and questions of their teaching and learning (McComish & Parsons, 2013). PLCs aid in creating an organization that creates an opportunity for teachers to buy-in, which creates a sense of lucidity and builds collective

worth (Stegall & Linton, 2012). By empowering teachers with PLCs, a school's administration allows for the growth of teacher-leaders and builds an increased atmosphere of ownership in the learning process within a school (Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2013). In addition to providing opportunities for leadership, PLCs setup for an environment where collegial trust establishes open and honest communications between members about their pedagogy and student learning (Gray, Kruse, & Tarter, 2015).

PLCs can generate positive outcomes on teachers' instruction with the use of critical reflection, which can result in improved student learning (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012). DuFour and Fullan (2013) described some of the benefits of using PLCs as teachers engaging in meaningful dialogue to promote positive changes, establishing a more efficient and collaborative school culture, establishing trust, developing leaders, and building a collective capacity around a focus on student learning. Watson (2014) argued that a "PLC is a vehicle for teacher-led change in schools" and where teacher-leaders develop to develop answers to questions about student learning through collaboration and effective communication (p. 22). Research findings show that PLCs have a positive impact on educator classrooms that translates into increased student outcomes due to the teachers being a part of a PLC (Brodie, 2013; Lunenburg, 2010). The foremost benefit of PLCs is to provide students with the best learning environment possible where teachers work together to solve problems through action research while allowing teachers and students to have a sense of ownership with their growth.

School Culture

Organizational culture has been the foundation for the idea of school culture (Karadag, Kilicoglu, & Yilmaz, 2014). Smirich (1983) describes school culture as "a shared meaning, perception, beliefs, and values among members of an organization" (p.345). Supporting Smirich's (1983) beliefs, Schein (1985) delivered a more explicit description by focusing on the facets of culture as "a pattern of shared beliefs, assumption, value systems among a group of people "(p.21). Schein (1985) described the components that create an organizational culture as being artifacts, values and norms, and underlying assumptions. School cultures are considered unique and distinctive among various schools, where these cultures are created and reinvented by people considered members of an organization (Hongboontri & Keawkhong, 2014). Some of these members may be teachers, students, administrators, parents, and community members. Childs, Burn, and McNicholl (2013) expanded on school culture definition using a "set of meanings that include norms, values, traditions, beliefs and myths transmitted historically, even though it may be perceived differently by school members" (p. 37). Schein (1999) described a school's or organization's culture consists of "artifacts, school's values, and shared assumptions (as cited in Lindhal, 2011, p. 19). A school's culture is a set of practices that an organization that shares a purpose, mission, values, and beliefs used in developing learning environment norms (Williams, Brien, & LeBlanc, 2012). School cultures per Minckler (2013) consisted of shared orientations, values, practices, and norms that hold a school together and gives it the school its identity. Turan

and Bektas (2013) emphasized the basic features of school culture as a collective vision, traditions, collaboration, joint decision-making, communication, and innovation. Muhammad (2009) expanded on the definition of a school's culture as the "unseen human factors of a school that affects the day-to-day practices and behaviors within a school" (p. 13).

School cultures can influence not merely student success but also the motivation of students and teachers, job satisfaction of teachers, the dedication of teachers, and the structure of a school's community (Karadag, Kilicoglu, & Yilmaz, 2014). Having positive school cultures allows the whole school community to prosper by having a positive influence on students by allowing them to prosper when teachers invest time and effort into student learning (Price, 2012). For positive school cultures to develop, trust among members, cooperation, and collaboration around shared goals and beliefs allow teachers to develop an environment that breeds coherence bringing school improvement to the forefront (Bryk et al., 2010). Sterrett and Irizarry (2014) elaborated the effects positive school culture has on a school as allowing for collaborative leadership that involves teachers in the decision-making and putting teachers in collaborative situations to create ownership in the school. A positive school culture allows for collective work where room for diversity of opinions exists with a focus on the shared norms and values of a school leading to the sharing of common practices and providing feedback on the group's or individual's pedagogy (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011).

Professional Learning Communities and School Culture

PLCs that work to create a positive school culture allow teachers to work together to agree on the essentials that need to be taught that allow for both teachers and students to grow (Leane, 2014). Hongboontri and Keawkhong (2014) found that PLCs created an environment with a positive school culture building a successful learning environment with the use of effective educator collaboration and communication. In addition, Thessin (2015) found that creating a positive school culture with the use of PLCs led to collaborative work that focused on collaborative leadership created an environment where students and teachers found success.

With the use of PLCs, DuFour and Fullan (2013) expressed that PLCs utilized in a systemic method led to a culture of continued success for student achievements and school success as well as teacher commitment and retention. Through the implementation of PLCs in schools, Rahman (2011) found that professional commitments become established with the use of respect, trust, and wisdom to create a school culture that produced a collaborative learning environment leading to greater student gains. With a school's culture created on the history and beliefs of the learning community, being able to create a positive school culture with the use of PLCs is dependent on the open and honest communications among teachers to create an environment where student learning is the focus (Turan & Bektas, 2013). The use of PLCs to create a positive school culture, schools can create an environment where teachers believe that every student can achieve and these students will achieve because of

what the teachers do (Muhammad, 2009; Thessin, 2015). With having a culture embedded with clear norms and an openness to accept failure as a way of learning to create more effective learning opportunities, teachers develop a pathway to a cultural shift that will lead to collaborative learning environments where more students are successful and teachers interdependent (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010; Williams, Brien, & LeBlanc, 2012).

The goal of this study was to provide information about PLC usage and sustainment and how PLCs usage impacts a school's culture. The literature review examined the theories of Bandura, Vygotsky, and Wenger to look at how adults learn together. PLCs were found through the literature to provide an opportunity for teachers to work together towards a common goal that has many benefits for a school, including increasing student achievement or successes. School culture was found to be a set of values, norms, beliefs, and traditions utilized to influence student success. The ability for a school to have a positive school culture allowed for teachers to work collectively with diverse opinions to achieve a common goal. Lastly, the literature presented possible impacts that PLCs have on a school culture including providing a successful learning environment, an opportunity for collaboration of teachers, development of leadership within PLCs, and allows for a cultural shift that leads to more student success and teacher interdependence and synergy.

Implications

PLCs can change the way a school organizes its staff, as well as the way teachers, operate with common practices and beliefs, which can result in the modification in a school's culture (Lippy & Zamora, 2012). This study used teachers' perceptions to examine the impact their PLCs have on the culture of XYZ High School. As a possible outcome of the study, I considered what makes PLCs sustainable and how the PLCs can function in the future to promote a more positive school culture and learning environment. A possible direction for the project created because of the study's data analysis could be a set of professional development activities focusing on the implementation and sustainment of PLCs at XYZ High School.

Summary

The focus of this qualitative study pertained to the perceptions of teachers and observations of PLC meetings to examine the impact PLCs have on a school's culture. PLCs are an effective way of organizing a school to garner successful student results. A possible benefit of using PLCs within a school is the increased dialogue among teachers to promote student learning by engaging in meaningful dialogue in a collaborative environment. The creation of a collaborative environment promotes positive changes by producing teacher-leaders and creating an environment that allows for critical reflection, as it pertains to the learning process of students and teachers' pedagogies (DuFour & Fullen, 2013). With using PLCs, a school's culture could alter due to their use in a way that produces positive student successes. A positive school culture created with the use

of PLCs has a way of bringing staff together and focusing them on the most important goal finding strategies of educating all students (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Thessin, 2015). The study has implications to promote social change by having teachers and administrators critically reflect on a school's PLC usage to determine if the culture of the school is impacted in a way that is promoting a learning environment for all students to succeed.

Teachers at XYZ High School meet weekly in their content-specific PLCs, but the school does not operate as a PLC. Thus, the staff at this school does not have a positive view of the school's culture based on State Report Card data. I examined the perceptions of teachers with the impact PLCs have on XYZ High School's culture by concentrating on the research questions.

The literature review for the study utilized a multiplicity of resources to reach a level of saturation on the topic of Professional Learning Communities and school culture. Search terms utilized to help me collect research from peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, books, and websites were *Professional Learning Communities, communities of practice, social learning, school culture, organizational culture, learning communities, learning environments,* and *teacher learning.* Section 1 of the study contained an introduction, problem statement, purpose, significance, and implications. Section 2 describes the qualitative research design chosen for the study, participants, ethical issues, data collection and analysis, and findings resulting from the research performed.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

The research design methodology chosen for this study is a qualitative case study that examined teachers' perspectives on the use of PLCs and their impact on a school's culture. A case study is a strategy of investigation where an in-depth examination of a setting, event, endeavor, process, individuals, or a group of participants (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research encompasses the investigation of a problem and the creation of a "detailed understanding of a central phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p.16). Qualitative research studies a phenomenon in their native setting while the research attempts to interpret how it affects people's lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The qualitative study enabled me to collect data to answer the major research question: how does the use of Professional Learning Communities, as perceived by PLC participants, impact the culture in secondary schools and the two sub-questions: (a) What aspects of school culture are impacted using Professional Learning Communities? and (b) How do secondary school teachers perceive the impact school leadership responsibilities have on a school's culture while participating in a PLC? I collected detailed, in-depth data by conducting semi-structured interviews and making observations of PLC meetings.

The study focused on examining the understanding of how Professional Learning Communities impact a school's culture from the perspective of PLC teachers. Thus, a qualitative study would allow for a greater insight into the participants' perceptions. A quantitative methodology was not applicable due to not having any variables or

relationships to examine in the study. Furthermore, the research questions for this study were not measurable and did not relate to any variables (Creswell, 2012, 2009).

Justification of Research Design

Researchers and research methodologists recognize and define five types of qualitative research designs including phenomenological, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and case study (Creswell, 2012, 2009; Lodico et al., 2010; & Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Phenomenological researchers study the human occurrences about a phenomenon as described by the participants (Creswell, 2009). Studies utilizing phenomenological methodology strive to comprehend the significance of actions and dealings of everyday people in specific circumstances (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Merriam (2009) ascertains the use of phenomenological studies is "to seek an understanding of the essences and the underlying structure of the phenomenon" (p.23). Due to phenomenologists typically communicating with and observing participants before any one-on-one interviews (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009), I did not feel this study method was appropriate for the project study. Phenomenology methodology was not chosen because I do not want to influence any of the participants during the study.

In addition to phenomenology, qualitative researchers utilize an ethnographical methodology to answer research questions. Ethnographic researchers attempt to create thick descriptions of culture from the perspectives of the participants by the researchers sharing in the meanings of the culture and bring those new understandings to an outsider of the culture (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Ethnography typically studies a cultural group

in their natural locale for a prolonged amount of time to gain a greater understanding of their culture and its meanings (Lodico et al., 2010). For ethnographic researchers to create vivid, thick descriptions of a groups' culture, environment, and behaviors, researchers must immerse themselves in the study's research location (Merriam, 2009). For this qualitative study, I see no need to be immersed in the culture of the group or the research setting to gather the data; ethnographic methodology was not used in this study

Researchers who utilize the grounded theory take an inductive stance and strive to derive meaning from the data collected as to connect to it the creation of possible theories (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2009) states grounded theory "is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants (p. 13). Additionally, grounded theory helps a study achieve generalizability or allow a study's findings to hold up beyond the specific research subjects or setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Grounded theory research constructs a theory when established theories do not focus on the research problem, the participants, or a process (Lodico et al., 2010). Utilizing the grounded theory research methodology was not appropriate for this study due to the lack of a need to generate a theory or describe a process (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Narrative research designs are used by researchers to portray the life experiences of individuals, gather and communicate stories about these participants' lives, and compose narratives about their experiences (Creswell, 2012). Lodico et al. (2010) explain narrative research as a method "that portrays the lives of people in a particular

setting or context through storytelling" (p. 502). Narrative researchers illustrate the experiences of people by gathering and communicating stories about the experiences of the participants and the understandings of these encounters (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009). The narrative research uses the stories of individuals as the collected data, explicitly first-person interpretations of experiences told as a story with a beginning, middle, and end (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2009) explains that narrative research is used when participants are choosing to tell their stories and with the utilization of these stories, the researcher can acquire an insight into the experiences of these individuals. The narrative research design was not appropriate for this study due to the researcher seeking to gather data on activities and processes associated with PLCs rather than data on individuals.

I elected to use a case study design to investigate the central phenomenon of how a suburban high school's Professional Learning Communities use impacts a school's culture from the perspective of a group of teachers. Lodico et al. (2010) expanded on the purpose of case studies as "a form of qualitative research that endeavors to discover meaning, to investigate processes, and to gain insight into and in-depth understanding of an individual, group, or situation" (p. 156).

Case Study Designs

Case study research uses in-depth explorations of individual subjects, groups, programs, or activity to create rich, thick descriptions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). In addition, Miles (2015) emphasized that "case studies allow

researchers to engage with and learn the world to shed light, generate new ways of understanding, seek interconnection in the complexity of the actions, and interactions around us" (p. 309). Yin (2014) ascertained that case study methodology has a goal of investigating the 'how' and 'why' questions about events. Thomas (2010) proposed that case studies provide a depiction and explanation of concrete and experience-based understandings to gather insight or understand a problem. The phenomenon or event investigated in a case study encompasses an investigation into the routines of those participants contained by the case (Kemmis, 2010). I investigated the impact PLCs have on a school's culture as perceived by PLC teachers. Case studies are an in-depth account and exploration of an occurrence, an individual, or program utilizing numerous sources of data (Pearson, Albon, & Hubball, 2015). The use of several sources of data encouraged comprehensive analysis and triangulation for providing richer detail about the case (Miles, 2015; Stake, 2010). The use of case study methodology in this research project aided in answering the guiding research question: How does the usage of Professional Learning Communities, as perceived by teachers, impact the culture in secondary schools?

Participants

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The location for the qualitative case study was a high school in a suburban school district. The school district is one of the sizable districts in the state with nearly 25,000 students and roughly 2,500 employees. XYZ High School houses around 2,300 students

with just over 110 teachers including teachers, administrators, and assistants. XYZ High School was the research site because PLCs are utilized to organize teachers by content area and the learning environment, based on the teacher satisfaction survey within state report card data, has deteriorated in recent years.

Roughly 110 teachers serve 2,300 students at XYZ High School in grades 9-12. Teachers at XYZ High School meet weekly to discuss student progress and issues as well as planning instructional activities and lessons. Creswell (2013) indicated purposeful sampling allows the researcher to choose participants authenticated by certain meaningful characteristics. I selected at least ten teachers for the study who have been working at XYZ High School and have been a member of a PLC for at least two years. I varied what grade level, the amount of teaching experience, and content area PLC, the teachers come from to create the sample. Selecting participants from various grade levels, content PLCs such as Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, Language Arts, and Related Arts, and experience levels allowed for the collection of data from various perspectives, which helped with the validity of the study.

By using the setting and participant criteria, I created an opportunity to gather and examine data on the teachers' perceptions of how PLCs impact a school's culture. Data collected from the high school teachers who participate in PLCs weekly afforded the opportunity to experience how these teachers see the use of PLCs in their school and the extent it impacts the culture of the school. Teachers who serve 9-12 general education, special education, and related arts content areas were invited to partake in the research.

Accumulated information from at least 10 participants from various content area PLCs and levels of experience created the opportunity to analyze data from multiple perspectives.

Sampling Method

The participants for the case study at XYZ High School was selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows researchers to select participants who can best help with assisting the researcher in comprehending the problem and the research question (Creswell, 2009). In addition, purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of the participants for this study to cultivate an exhaustive examination of the study's central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Specifically, I utilized purposeful random sampling by identifying 84 teachers who work in PLCs for at least two years at the school under study then randomly sampling 12 of them from the group of PLC teachers by utilizing random group generator software. The rationale for utilizing a random sampling process of identifying a population of interest was developing a methodical method of selecting cases that are not based on advanced information of how the outcomes would emerge. The participants were chosen based on their ability to respond to the research questions for the qualitative case study. Participants were selected with the ability to answer the research questions based on their membership in a PLC at XYZ High School for at least two years. This ensured that the participants had adequate experience in a PLC at the school under study to provide insight into the usage of PLCs and their possible impact on the school's culture

Access to Participants

An IRB application was submitted for the approval of the research proposal. I submitted a written request to the principal asking for approval to utilize XYZ High School as the research site (see Appendix E). In the written request, the number of anticipated study participants was addressed as well as the level of participation by the research participants, XYZ High School PLC members. The written request to conduct research at the study site was all that was required to conduct the research at XYZ High School. Following the approval of both the school and Walden's Institutional Review Board, I met with the administration to communicate the findings of my research and to help identify possible participants that meet the criteria for the study. From this meeting, I created a list of teachers who fit the study criteria of being a PLC member at XYZ High School for at least two years. Once a group of participants was identified, I used a random group generating software to select the participants from the identified group of PLC teachers. Following the selection of the research sample, I distributed an email invitation and consent form for the participants to return via an email response. Out of the 12 participants selected, I received 10 responses, or an 83% response rate, to consenting to be a part of the study. Once the informed consent documents were collected, I arranged a date, time, and location for the individual semi-structured interviews.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

The researcher's role in a qualitative study is to promote a relationship with participants based on trust and understanding (Creswell, 2009). I focused on respecting participant views and presenting a method that is open-minded and professional as the primary researcher in this study to cultivate a relationship built on trust. Lodico et al. (2010) expressed that building a positive rapport with study participants allows researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of their views of the world.

I have been a secondary teacher at XYZ High School for the last five years and have created a rapport with many of the possible participants. Having this pre-established rapport allowed participants to speak freely about their views and perceptions on the use PLCs and their impact on school culture. As a member of the faculty of XYZ High School, I have a vested interest in utilizing PLCs in a manner that creates efficient schools. I took caution as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis to avoid any bias presenting themselves during these processes (Merriam, 2009). To aid in avoiding any biases presenting themselves, I utilized member checking by the participants to confirm the accuracy of the data by permitting participants to review the interview transcripts and summaries of the findings. Since I have been a member of a PLC within XYZ High School, I used a peer reviewer to ensure that my personal experiences have not influenced the data collection and analysis processes.

Ethical Issues

Throughout the study, I upheld the confidentiality of the participants by maintaining the data collected from the participants in a confidential manner being careful not to allow for identification of the participants (Creswell, 2012, 2009). During the data collection and analysis for this study, the participants were given a pseudonym to ensure that the participants cannot be identified. The master list of participants and pseudonyms will be kept with the other study data and destroyed after five years.

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, I utilized a transcribing software such as Dragon Speech Recognition Software that translated the digital voice recordings to text (Nuance Communications, 2013). By transcribing the interviews personally using this technology and utilizing pseudonyms to identify the participants, I did not expose any identification information of the participants that could cause harm to them and identify the research site. During the study, I attempted to cause negligible interruptions to the research site and respect the participants' and sites confidentiality by doing the interviews before and after school at an alternative site.

All participants signed an informed consent form before any data collection. The risks to the participants were no greater than undergone in their everyday lives. The informed consent form developed consists of the following information: my name, sponsoring university of my study, purpose, potential benefits and risks of participation, the amount of study involvement, confidentiality agreement, and assurance the participants may remove themselves at any time from the study.

As for the information collected for the study, I have stored the participants' informed consent forms, PLC observation forms, interview notes, and the recording device I intend to utilize in a secure filing cabinet in my home. The transcribed interviews were stored on my home computer as well as on a USB drive, which are both passwords protected. All data collected for the study will be retained in a secure location for five years and then will be destroyed. Once the specified time of 5 years passes, I will shred all the paper documents linked to my research by using my personal home paper shredder. In addition, I will demolish the USB drive to destroy all the information collected including the notes from my study, data, transcriptions, and data analyses.

Data Collection

For the study, I developed an interview protocol to carry out the semi-structured, individual interviews to address my research questions (see Appendix B). An interview protocol aided in the gathering of data in a systemic and attentive method with a list of topics or questions to address with the participants (Lodico et al., 2010). In addition, semi-structured interviews utilized questions that are flexible and a mix of various levels of structured questions to let the researcher discover the answer to the research questions (Merriam, 2009). Using semi-structured interview questions gave the researcher the ability to react to the scenario at hand, and any new ideas on the topic brought forth by the participant (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam, 2009). The data needed to answer the research questions of the study came from the semi-structured interviews of the 10 participants, which included the demographic information about the participant's

experience and background, as well as thorough explanations of their perceptions on the impact PLCs have on a school's culture.

Interviews and Observations

The interviews for the study provided me with a deeper insight into the teachers' perceptions while maintaining room for the respondents to voice their opinion in a safe environment. An interview allowed for me to gather more in-depth information and explore more complex beliefs or experiences (Lodico et al., 2010). The use of an interview created a situation where I could focus on a small group of participants to gather multiple, in-depth perspectives of the phenomena. In addition to the interviews, I made observations of the weekly content PLC meetings. Observations allow for "the systematic and careful examination of the phenomena being studied" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 114). During these observations, I utilized an observation protocol to record what occurs during these meetings (see Appendix C). The use of an observational form or protocol guided the collection of data in a systematic and focused manner (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). An observational form allowed for a focused observation by identifying areas the researcher must attend to and provides organized space for writing brief descriptions of conversations and interactions (Creswell 2009). From these observations, I looked for any common topics or issues that present themselves and the culture established among the teachers while the PLC meetings occur. The use of observations of PLC meetings aided in developing the teachers' perceptions of the school's culture regarding using PLCs. The use of observations and interviews allowed

for the examination of the teacher perceptions as it pertains to the impact PLCs have on a school's culture.

Data Tracking System

Once the participants were identified, I set up a time for the interviews to commence. Each participant was interviewed individually with the interviews being digitally recorded. In addition, to the use of digital recording device, I made notes on the interview protocol for each participant. As for the observations, I utilized the PLC schedule ascertained from the meeting with the administration and planned the observations around the PLC schedule for XYZ High School. I attended a content PLC's meeting from each of the following departments: Mathematics, Science, Language Arts, Social Studies, and Related Arts. At XYZ High School there are 25 content PLCs that meet weekly. I observed five PLC meetings from the 25 weekly meetings during this study. Each meeting observed came from a different department within the school, such as Mathematics, Science, etc. The data from the PLC meeting observations was recorded on the observational protocol form (See Appendix C) and any reflections on the meeting were added directly following the conclusion of the meeting.

Throughout the data collection phase of the study, I maintained a reflective journal. I kept track of the data and emerging understandings that presented themselves during the data collection process with the use of a reflective journal. Lodico et al. (2010) suggested the use of a journal for qualitative research as means to "record and examine the researcher's subjective impressions during a study to control researcher bias

and provides a flexible space for recording and analyzing some types of data" (p. 132). By keeping a research journal, I could keep track of the research activities on a daily and weekly basis while being able to make any inferences about the data that are collected. Keeping the journal allowed me to have enough information to identify initial codes and themes to aid in the data analysis.

Role of the Researcher

I have been a secondary teacher for the past five years in the district where the research site is located. I am interested in this research since I have been a teacher for the past 13 years and I am invested in the field of education, particularly the effectiveness of schools and PLCs. Lodico et al. (2010) describe the degrees of participation of a researcher as being a complete observer, participant as an observer, observer as participant, and complete observer. For this study, I took the role of a complete observer. I observed the participants' activities while recording the observations passively in an uninvolved and detached manner as possible (Lodico et al., 2010). In addition to the PLC meeting observations, I had interactions with the participants in a more prescribed and controlled process using semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2012). Bulpitt and Martin (2010) explained that goal of interviews is "to bring about intellectual understandings for the benefit of the interviewer, interviewee, and the professional as well as the academic communities" (p. 11). By maintaining the role of the complete observer, I had no direct participation in the PLC activities during the meeting observations and focused on recording my observations and findings of the PLC meetings.

During the observations and interviews, I also had the role as the primary instrument for the data collection. I had the ability to be responsive and adaptive during the data collection process by being able to comprehend through non-verbal cues, clarify or summarize information with the participant, and check for accuracy with the respondents by being the primary instrument for data collection (Merriam, 2009). However, as the primary instrument, I made sure that I identified and monitored my biases in a way that does not shape the data collection process. With the use of reflexivity, I explained my biases, assumptions, and dispositions as it applies to this research study. To ensure that my biases are not reflected in the study's data, I used the member checking process to allow the participants to re-check the study's findings. Also, I used a peer reviewer to inspect the interview protocol, data collected, and the findings of the study to reduce any biases that present themselves.

Data Analysis

Once all the data were collected, I organized the transcribed interviews and observation forms to examine the data and look for recurring themes. I used a computer program, QDA Miner Lite, which performs qualitative data analysis to keep and arrange the data, add categories and codes from the participant responses as recommended by the software developer, and examine for emerging themes. The findings of my data analysis aided in the creation of rich, thick descriptions to create a narrative discussion.

Credibility of Findings

To ensure quality and accuracy of the evidence of the data collected from the study, I utilized triangulation, member checking, and a peer reviewer. Creswell (2012) described validity as 'the degree to which all of the evidence points to the intended interpretation" (p. 159). In this study, I interviewed ten teachers that have been in a PLC for at least two years at the school under study and congruently observed PLC meetings in action. I began by emailing teachers invitation emails to collect informed consent and at the return of the consent, I scheduled the interviews. I gave the teachers the option of times to conduct the interviews, which occurred during the non-instructional part of the school day. I recorded the interviews with a digital recorded while taking notes on copies of the interview protocol, which I gave each participant a copy to allow them to read the questions as we conducted the interview. I could not only take notes on the interview protocol sheets during the interview, but I could make any reflections once the participant left. During the interviews, I had to stop myself from beginning to lead the responses of the participants to gather certain answers. I could prevent myself from leading the responses and allowed the participants to respond openly with their thoughts and perceptions of PLCs and school culture. To prevent leading the participant responses, I asked the interview question from the created protocol and allowed the respondents to communicate freely without any interruptions. Once all the interviews were completed, I then transcribed each interview and searched for any emerging themes in the transcript

with the aid of coding. After the process had been completed, I emailed the teachers the transcripts to them to finish the member checking process.

Triangulation was used to ensure the validity of the study by looking at the transcribed interviews and PLC observations to ensure the credibility of the research. Using triangulation of several sources of data allows the researcher to confirm any emerging findings in the study (Merriam, 2009). Triangulation allowed me to corroborate the evidence from both the interviews of the PLC members and the observations of PLC meetings. While performing the triangulation, I crosschecked the data by looking at the observations field notes and interview responses collected from teachers with different perspectives (Lodico et al., 2010; Merriam, 2009). Using triangulation to interpret and check the data from multiple viewpoints enhanced the credibility of not only the information but also the results and inferences produced from the study (Creswell, 2012). I checked the data accurately to answer the research questions through a proper data analysis process.

To improve the credibility of the information from the study, I asked participants to complete a member checking process. The member checking process permitted the participants to examine interview findings and their data to check for accuracy (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Participants had the opportunity to complete the member checking procedure towards the completion of this study after the data analysis. I provided each participant with a printed reproduction of their transcribed interview and study's findings to ensure the accuracy of the one-on-one interviews. I performed these

member checks privately with each participant to ensure confidentiality. During these member checking, the participants had the ability to clarify any responses on the transcribed interviews and confirm the findings. All the participants found that the findings were accurate after they emailed a confirmation of their review. The participants reported that the transcripts were true to their expressed perceptions.

In addition to triangulation and member checking, the use of a peer reviewer was utilized to confirm the findings of a case study are both accurate and truthful (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam; 2009). The peer reviewer I utilized is a colleague who already possesses a doctoral degree and is comfortable with the research process. With the transcribed interviews, I made sure to maintain the confidentiality of the participants' responses by assigning each one a pseudonym, for example, Participant 8, and I de-identified any information, so the participants' identity could not be figured out. I asked the peer-reviewer to look over my data and findings to make sure the data was both valid and reliable. The peer-review process occurred over multiple meetings outside of the research site to allow for authentic communications between the reviewer and myself. The use of the peer-reviewer, who was familiar with the doctoral process, allowed for the scanning of the raw data to assess whether the findings were plausible based on the data (Merriam, 2009). In addition, the peer reviewer helped with identifying any discrepant information that threatened the credibility of the study.

Limitations

This qualitative case study possibly contained weaknesses or limitations (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). My personal views and knowledge could manipulate the way I may interpret the information and outcomes of my study since I am an educator at the research site who is involved in PLCs. To fully disclose, I am an educator at the research site, where I had a general education classroom and actively participated in a content PLC. During the study, I continued to perform my normal duties, professional development activities, and PLC activities. I am not an administrator nor have I had any role that would hold an administrative capacity at XYZ High School, which should eliminate any conflict of interest. My teaching and non-leadership position at the research site did not influence the data collection or guide responses to interview probes or observations made. Even though I am employed at the research site, I strived to maintain all participant data confidentially as expressed in the guidelines of the informed consent form.

Data Analysis Results

The data collection and analysis for this study were performed in a manner that maintained the confidentiality of all participants. The data analysis was inductive in form by going from detailed data, such as transcribed interviews and observation notes, to the wide-ranging codes and themes (Creswell, 2012). A goal of the research for this case study was to investigate the impact PLCs have on a school's culture through the perspectives of PLC educators. To accomplish this goal, the data were collected and

interpreted in a manner to generate emerging themes focusing on school culture and PLCs (Merriam, 2009). Throughout the data collection process, I made sure to adhere to all IRB-approved procedures and protocols while maintaining the credibility of the findings as well as the confidentiality of the participants and data collected.

Data Analysis Process

The data collection for this study on examining the impact PLCs have on a school's culture was a two-fold process that included semi-structured interviews and observations. The initial collection step included securing appointments and informed consent with potential study participants. The participants of the interviews were ten teachers who have been involved in PLCs and have been a member of the school's faculty for at least two years. The data generated from the interviews were gathered from ten high school teachers with varied levels of teaching experiences and backgrounds. The participants included:

- Participant 1: 10-15 years of high school teaching experience; master's degree.
- Participant 2: 15-20 years of high school teaching experience; master's degree.
- Participant 3: 10-15 years of high school teaching experience with 10 plus years of school administration experience; master's degree.
- Participant 4: 20+ years of middle and high school teaching experience; bachelor's degree.

- Participant 5: 15-20 years of middle and high school teaching experience; master's degree
- Participant 6: 10-15 years of high school teaching experience; master's degree.
- Participant 7: 10-15 years of high school teaching experience; master's degree plus post-graduate coursework.
- Participant 8: 10-15 years of high school teaching experience; master's degree.
- Participant 9: 5-10 years of high school teaching experience; master's degree.
- Participant 10: 15-20 years of high school teaching experience; bachelor's degree.

The participants' semi-structured interviews utilized an interview protocol to keep the interviews focused on PLCs and school culture (See Appendix B). The interviews were recorded with the use of a digital audio recorded. The use of speech recognition software was used in the transcription of the recorded interviews. Using a digital recorder freed up my attention from taking notes to keeping my focus on the interviewee and their responses as well as possible follow-up questions to the responses.

The second phase of the data collection was the observations of PLC meetings. The meetings did not necessarily have the interview participants in them but two of the PLC meetings that I observed did have an interview participant in them. The PLC meetings I observed were chosen at random by inputting the PLC meetings and their

times into a random group generator. Selecting PLCs using a group generator allowed for the selection to be random without favoring or avoiding any PLC group. I made observations of five PLC meetings, which included content PLC from the following departments: Math, Science, English, Social Studies, and Career and Technology. To gather the data from the observations, I utilized a PLC meeting observation form to record the data from the observation (See Appendix C).

Research Findings

The results of the research for this study were constructed from perceptions of teachers involved in PLCs and the observations of PLC meetings. I studied 10 teachers' perceptions of the impact PLCs have on a school's culture. The two research questions served as an outline for the development of the 10 interview questions (See Appendix B). The connections between the research questions and the interview questions are found in Table 1. When presented to the study's 10 participants, these interview questions and responses along with the PLC meeting observations generated the data collected during this study.

Table 1

Connection Between the Research and Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Question From Interview Protocol
RQ1. What aspects of school culture are impacted by the use of Professional Learning Communities?	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10
RQ2. How do secondary school teachers perceive the impact school leadership responsibilities have on a school's culture while participating in a PLC?	1,3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10

Note. Interview questions can be found on the Interview Protocol located in Appendix B.

Perceptions on the use of PLCs at XYZ High School

The initial part of the data collection with the interviews consisted of the perceptions on the use of PLCs at XYZ High School. During the opening phase of the interviews, I wanted to gain a further understanding of the PLCs used at the research site. My initial questions to the participants asked for the strengths and weaknesses of using PLCs as an organizational model. As for the strengths, as perceived by the participants, the responses varied from the PLC being a sounding board to share ideas and practices to working together to gather the new ideas. Participants 2, 4, 5, 6, and 8 strongly stressed the importance of collaboration using PLCs with Participant 4 stating that "Collaborating

is a way to work together to be most effective since two heads are better than one." In addition, Participants 1, 3, and 7 felt PLCs were a method for sharing the workload and new ideas, and best practices as well as sounding board to develop strategies for helping struggling students, specifically Participant 7 stated "PLCs allows teachers to talk to other teachers that are teaching the same subject area by forcing them to get off their island or out of their classroom with all that they do." Participant 9 mentioned, "My department PLC has great ideas, and the use of a PLC is an avenue for us to share." In terms of strengths, Participant 10 believed that PLCs is a way to share the workload to help develop lessons and assessments, but specifically, a PLC can act as an accountability among teachers who are teaching the same content.

A subsequent part of the second interview questions was to describe any weaknesses that PLCs may have as an organizational model. A common response among Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10 felt that a PLCs real weakness came about from the strengths and weaknesses of each PLC's members. Specifically, Participant 5 stated, "A PLCs weakness comes about from the forced mixture of professionals and not every member is as reliable or dependable as you would like and you will be left holding the bag when something isn't taken care of." Participant 10 believed that the biggest weakness of PLCs at the research site is "Having unreliable members that do not show up or participate without consequence and thus the PLC falls apart due to not having any ramifications for not showing up or participating." In addition, Participants 1 and 7 felt that the biggest weakness to utilizing PLCs at the school was that there was a lack of

autonomy that allows teachers to account for the differences in each period or teacher's classroom. Participant 7 stressed that "Teaching the same thing, the same way, at the same time does not differentiate and account for the differences in the abilities and backgrounds in each classroom." Subsequently, Participants 2 and 9 mentioned the weakness of the PLCs at the school is a lack of support from the administration or leadership. Participant 2 reflected: "There is a lack of support from the administration where there are expectations from us but the administration does not know what is going on in the PLC and how that reflects into the classroom." Participant 8 felt that there were no real weaknesses with using PLCs as an organizational model.

The third question of the interview asked participants to reflect on the methods utilized by their PLC to ensure effective and efficient us of their time at school and if none were mentioned, what would they like to see implemented. Participants 1, 4, 6. 7, and 8 felt that the use of specific date and time to conduct the PLC meetings allowed for the most efficient use of their time at school, in terms of using PLCs. Specifically, Participant 1 reflected: "Our PLC plans to meet at a certain date and time while attempting to keep these meetings brief with all the other things we are expected to do." Participant 6 also stated that the use of a specific meeting date and time were efficient, but these "Meetings get disrupted quite often even with the administration's best effort to provide a common planning period among PLC members, which forces a lot of our communication to occur through email." Participants 2, 5, and 10 felt that the use of email and online document sharing allowed for the most efficient use of their time in

their PLCs at school. Participant 5 stated, "We use online document sharing to allow for collaboration among our PLC members, and we attempt to keep a rigid structure to our meetings, which has been handed down by the district subject/content specialist." Participant 10 reflected: "We email each other and identify a period we can sit down to get to business and these emails allow to have an idea of what needs to be discussed before the meeting starts." In addition, Participant 3 felt that the use of PLCs allows for the teaching the "Same thing in a way that the kids get the same content in each subject and having a common set of standards aids in this." Participant 9 explained that their PLC "Works as a team to prepare to create consistent lessons ensure the same material is taught."

The subsequent interview question dealt with the Professional Learning Community's experiences as it pertains to collaboration and communication. Participants 2, 3, 5, and 6 felt that they best collaborated and communicated using email and online file-sharing software since it allowed for collaboration without the need to always have a face-to-face meeting. Participants 1 and 9 believed that the use of weekly meetings along with consistent email communications allowed for the most collaboration. Participant 4 felt that "PLCs allow for more collaboration and communication just goes hand in hand with me when it comes to working together." Participant 7 added: "Communicating is a must for our group to work, and if there is no communication, then what is the point of working in a PLC." Participant 8 stated, "An open exchange of ideas can occur with a functional PLC, but when the administration is involved, it can limit open communication

or dialogue due to possible repercussions." Participant 10 mentioned communication that is consistent and constant allows for a more "positive PLC."

The fifth question of the interview was the last question that dealt with PLCs in general. The participants were asked about the reflecting on the most positive and negative aspects of being a part of a PLC. For the most positive aspect of being a part of a PLC, most of the participants felt that working together and building a comradery seemed to be the most positive. Participants 1 and 4 felt that the division of duties or assignments were the most positive aspect of being a part of a PLC. Participant 5 reflected on the continuous learning process that is involved in being a part of a PLC. As for the negative aspects of being a part of a PLC, Participants 1,2, and 7 felt that a lack of autonomy in their classrooms was the most negative aspect of being a part of a PLC at XYZ High School. Participants 3, 5, and 10 expressed that strong personalities of members lead to others not working together was the most negative aspect. Participants 6, 8, and 9 felt that there was a lack of support from the administration and district is the most negative aspect of being a part of a PLC at XYZ High School. Participant 4 stressed that "Without any guidance on the usage of PLCs, they tend to become a gripe session where the meeting becomes a waste of time."

When it came to discovering the perceptions of the participants in terms of the school's usage of PLCs found that the common strength among the PLCs was collaborating and sharing the workload as well as best practices. With regard to possible weaknesses of using PLCs at the school under study, it was a common trend to hear that

the strengths and weaknesses of the PLC members lead to ineffective functioning PLCs, especially when it came to forced or inorganic groupings of PLC members. As for the PLCs affecting the classroom, participants felt that the current usage of the PLCs leads to a lack of autonomy for each members' classroom. As for the efficient use of time, the use of hard scheduled meeting days and times lead to the best use of teachers' time. In addition, the use of communicating and collaborating through email and a document sharing software lead to an increased efficiency in the PLCs. The most positive aspect of using PLCs as an organizational model was working together and building comradery amongst members. As for the negative aspects of utilizing PLCs at XYZ High School, a lack of autonomy in the classrooms and dealing with strong personalities have led to negative perceptions of PLCs. In addition, a lack of support from the administration and district, regarding PLC usage and sustainment, has resulted in teachers feeling frustrated with the PLCs.

Perceptions of PLCs and School Culture at XYZ High School

In addition, the interviews dealt with PLCs and school culture at XYZ High School. The second phase specifically utilized interview questions 6, 7, and 8. Interview question 6 asked participants to reflect on the school's culture. Participant 1 felt the school had shared values but overall seemed to lack the knowledge to explain in detail about the school's culture. Participant 2 felt that the school is terrific and believes that PLCs are supported. Participant 3 reflected on the school having a shared mission, values, and beliefs that are handed down to the staff but the school is too big leading to a

change in the culture. Participant 4 reflected: "Within my PLC the culture is fine but among other PLCs not so much due to the different personalities involved." Participant 5 felt that the end-of-course exams tended to drive the culture of the school since the focus is on test results and that drives the culture at the school. Participant 6 reflected: "The school tries to have shared norms and values but the practices are forced on the faculty and PLCs as well as the school has become too large to the point of affecting the school's culture." Participant 7 felt that "We don't all have the same mission in our PLCs and within the school and there is a lot of lying going on in what is going on in the PLCs, specifically saying things to please the admin." Participant 7 felt that a double message was being conveyed when it comes to the function of the PLCs. Participant 8 believed that the PLCs created an environment of support and the school has a fairly effective leader that is trying to "operate as a family of 200". Participant 9 felt that there was a lot of school culture and it was apparent that there was a lack of school knowledge with this participant. Participant 10 felt that data analysis was a huge factor affecting the school's culture and that the leadership stresses data analysis to make decisions.

As a follow-up to the previous question on the school's culture, it was asked of the participants if the school's culture has changed since they have been a member of the faculty. I felt it was a strong statement for seven out of the participants to state that the school's culture has changed. Most of the participants who agreed with this felt that the culture has changed somewhat due to the size of the school continuing to increase year after year. Participant 7 felt that "PLCs have created a discontent among members since

they are no longer treated as professionals and are told what to do from above such as the district and administrative team." Participant 5 added: "The teachers are disconnected, and there is little to no teaming occurring especially with cross-curricular instruction." The other three of the ten participants felt that the culture of the school has not changed due to the leadership not changing since the school's inception.

The next interview question had the participants reflect on the effectiveness of the PLC in improving or sustaining the school's culture. Participant 1 and 2 both felt that the PLCs within the school were effective due to the collaboration of teachers to reach a common goal of educating all students. Participant 3 reflected: "PLCs allow educators to teach what we are supposed to be teaching when we are supposed to be teaching it will lead to an effective school." Participant 4 expressed that "PLCs help change or shape the culture of a school by keeping people connected and allows for the maintaining of relationships to keep us from working by ourselves to solve the issues of educating all students." Participant 5 felt that teachers were dedicated and hold themselves to a high standard, but PLCs can be ineffective when there is no talking across the curriculum with different PLCs. Participant 6 felt that "PLCs allowed a time to talk and reflect on our values and practices but as a whole is negatively affecting our school's culture." Participant 6 followed-up with a suggestion of having an advisory committee on PLCs to get feedback on the effectiveness of the PLC practices. Participant 7 expressed "PLCs can be effective if everyone is on the same page by communicating and can be ineffective by feeling minimalized just like another cog in the wheel." Participant 8 added: "The

influence from the district with their over-involvement is leading to a decrease in the school's culture with the PLCs having very little control of what is passed down and mandated for the PLCs and school to do." Participant 9's response to this question did not discuss the effectiveness of the PLC in terms of maintaining the school's culture. Participant 10 expressed: "Accepting the data to help drive the decision-making process is an effective use of PLCs and can be ineffective if people do not want to work together to analyze the data make educational decisions."

Question 8 of the interview asked participants to reflect on the impact that PLCs have on the school's culture. Participant 1 felt "PLCs can be positive or negative of a school's culture especially negative when collaboration and communication are inconsistent or lacking." Participant 2 added: "PLCs have an impact on a school's culture if teachers are willing to talk to each other and share things." Participant 3 reflected: "Yes, it impacts a school's culture, especially if teachers could communicate and teach across the curriculum." Participant 4 believed that PLCs do impact a school's culture by allowing teachers to learn from each other and it allows for checks and balances among group members as well as the ability to see things from another perspective that a person may not otherwise. Participant 5 did not know if the PLCs affected the school's culture but stressed that there had been very little training on the use of PLCs, which could impact the school's culture with mishandled PLCs. Participant 6 also could not tell if PLCs affect the school's culture, but it does affect the actual culture within PLCs and departments. Participant 7 felt that "PLCs have worked opposite of the

intended intentions by making teachers more secretive in what they are doing as well as the size of the school has affected the culture by making the school more institutionalized." Participant 8 believed if PLCs were not well structured or guided, they can become gripe sessions and a waste of everyone's time. Participant 9 expressed: "My PLC is active and communicates well, which has led to a sustained culture at least within my actual PLC." Participant 10 state working collaboratively amongst group members tends to increase the trust between members and the students see the working relationships, which helps build a trust between teachers and students.

When it came to PLCs and school culture, I found through the interviews that the school did have a set of norms and practices but neither were communicated or utilized efficiently. The perception of the school's culture has changed over the past few years. The PLCs were found to affect the school culture but not always for the positive, especially when there was a lack of communication with PLCs and school-wide. Particularly, there was a lack of accountability with the PLCs when the teachers felt the PLCs tend to become gripe sessions and with a lack of guidance, the PLCs can become ineffective towards the goal of collaborating to meet the needs of students.

Perceptions of School Leadership Impact on School Culture

The last part of the interview looked at the perceptions of the PLC members as it pertains to school leadership's impact on the school's culture. The function of this question was to see the role of school leadership as it pertains to school culture and PLCs. Participant 1 felt that the leadership affected the pacing in the classroom, which has led to

a lack of autonomy and a slight feeling of resentment for not being able to be creative in one's classroom. Participant 2 expressed "Leaders are leading at the school, and they attempt to create an atmosphere of togetherness, but it seems to fall short." Participant 3 added: "The leadership is trickle-down from the principal, but we do not see the administration as involved as they need to be with our school's PLCs." Participant 4 expressed: "Our leadership expects us to have PLCs while making us answer to a high authority but with a lack of observations or feedback on the usage or implementation of PLCs makes the staff question the effectiveness of using PLCs." Participant 5 felt the leadership held the staff to a higher standard but rarely are involved in any PLC meetings, and this participant further expressed that time is in issue for the leadership team, especially with what is asked of them from the district. Participant 6 believed: "The leadership is too involved in PLCs except for the lack of feedback and communication, especially with expectations that are given to us without communicating with PLCs members about what is going on and what is needed." Participant 7 added: "The responsibilities of the administration are becoming more and more outside of the building and thus, there is a loss of the same closeness, which might be adding to the loss of the students' trust." Participant 8 felt the administration is inaccessible for PLC duties due to the growing amount of district demands. Particularly, the participant stated, "In the beginning, the principal stated you don't work for me, she worked with us but I do not sense that anymore, and there is a greater separation between the administration and the staff." Participant 9 believes there is a good foundation in the leadership at the school

with the rules and policies but in terms of PLCs and culture, she thinks there is a lack of direction on their usage. Participant 10 strongly expressed: "The teachers are forced to use PLCs from the administration without ramifications for non-participating members, which can lead to resentment among group members that can impact the culture of the school." This participant also expressed concern for the lack of communication among administration and the faculty in terms of PLCs, and it was felt among a few other participants that PLCs usage and instruction needs to be addressed throughout the year instead of for a few minutes in an opening of the year meeting.

A closing question for the participants asked the participants to deliver some advice for teams looking to utilize PLCs to help sustain a school's culture. Participant 1 felt it was important to be open-minded with others in the PLC and to listen to what others have to say. Participant 2 suggested to communicate often and to practice humility, which can go a long way in the end. Participant 3 stressed the sharing of ideas and to work together to create continuity. Participant 4 expressed: "PLCs have to start from the top-down and guidelines need to be established among the school and the PLC itself as well as being able to disagree without being disagreeable." Participant 5 recommended being open to other's ideas, sharing best practices, and accepting constructive criticism to grow as a professional. Participant 6 stressed the importance of building relationships with trust, and to allow freedom for PLCs but have a set of guidelines and accountability. Participant 7 suggested, to be honest, and accept criticism to allow for professional growth. Participant 8 reflected: "Try to be a family as a staff

and continue to build relationships." Participant 9 advised other PLCs need to form a bond among members and communicate honestly and often. Participant 10 felt "There needs to be support for PLCs from the administration in the form of guidelines, accountability measures, and instructions for the use of PLCs to help sustain the school's culture."

From the participants' interview responses, it was perceived that the school leadership or administration does impact the school culture at the school under study. It was found that the leaders are leading with the everyday functioning of the school but is lacking in providing guidance, direction, and accountability part of utilizing PLCs as an organizational model. The administration was perceived to have too much on their plates or too many mandated roles and responsibilities to truly be involved in the usage and sustainment of PLCs at XYZ High School. With a lack of an accountability piece with the usage of PLCs, the PLCs, based on the interviewee responses, seem to be ineffective at times due to lack of a measure of responsibility to ensure participation from all its member and proper usage of PLC meeting time. In addition to a need for a piece of responsibility, the participants suggested that PLC members strive to be open-minded, communicate effectively and often, share best practices, and work to build positive relationships with all members to make a PLC effective in maintaining a school's culture.

Observations of PLC Meetings

Observations during the data collection phase of this study were made to focus on the practices of the PLCs and if these meetings addressed school culture. The PLC

meeting observations were made over a three-week period. The PLC meetings observed were from the following departments: Mathematics, English, Social Studies, Science, and CATE (career and technology). Each observation lasted a minimum of twenty minutes per observation per PLC selected. The PLCs selected for observation have been chosen randomly through a group selector program. In total, five separate observations were made during the data collection phase. I made observations and field notes on the PLC Meeting Observation Form (See Appendix C).

The meetings that were observed focused on funding, the pacing of unit or lessons, assessments, activities to use for lessons, lesson planning for the future, and discussing what to do with students who are struggling. Out of the meetings, I observed, only one of the PLC meetings had an agenda that was either displayed or distributed to the members. PLC meeting 1 had the agenda on display through a presentation software with the use of a smartboard projector. In addition, PLC meeting 5 did not have an agenda on display, but it was mentioned during the meeting that they would be continuing their discussion that had started the previous day through email. As for any PLC norms, none of the groups explicated stated or mentioned PLC norms or practices, but two of the PLCs seemed to have pre-established norms while it was unclear in the other three meetings. In the same groups, PLCs 1 and 4, it was evident that the group had shared norms, values, and practices on display during these observations. It seemed as if each of these PLCs were on the same page and seemed to communicate quite well together. PLCs 2, 3, and 5 did not seem to have an established culture that would lead to

effectively utilizing their time in their PLC meetings, which was evidenced due to a lack of apparent or established norms during the meeting, a lack of meeting agendas, and various conversations occurring not related to the subject of the meeting, especially when one of the observed meetings consisted of more griping than collaborating.

As for school culture being addressed through these observations, school culture was only specifically mentioned in one of the 5 PLC meeting observations. PLC 1 discussed school culture with concerns about what was going on in and out of their classrooms, especially with students being in the hallways with excessive amounts of students being late to class, and the lack of communication between the district and the PLCs or departments. The other four PLC meetings did not have any mention of school culture during their PLC meeting observation. Roadblocks or distractions were present in four out of five observations of the PLC meetings. PLC 1 did not have any roadblocks or distractions present during their meeting. PLC 2 did have a disagreement on the pacing and parts of an assessment that was to be utilized, but through collective and productive group discussion, the PLC seemed to come up with a solution. PLC 3 did bring up some school and district policies that they were concerned about, and thus, the meeting ends up becoming a gripe session and productivity of the PLC was lost. PLC 4 had distractions in the form of three intercom disruptions calling for teachers to go to other meetings such as an IEP meeting. The distractions seemed to get the group of topic or message really, and the meeting seemed to conclude with a gripe session. PLC 5's meeting seemed to be productive at first but when the topic of communication among the administration and

faculty, the members seemed dissatisfied, and the meeting ended as a gripe session. As for the amount and quality of the interactions among the PLC members, I would say from my observations that most of the members were engaged in the process with only a few members being pre-occupied with other duties such as checking emails or attempting to "quickly" grade some quizzes or assignments. Out of the five observations, two of the PLCs seemed to have open and honest communication really and it was apparent that the relationships in the PLC were established and positive.

In total, five observations were made using the content-area PLCs from the following departments at school under study: Mathematics, English, Science, Social Studies, and CATE. Four out of the five meetings did not have any displayed or distributed agendas on the goals and purposes of the meeting. The pre-established norms and practices were not mentioned or utilized by three out of the five meetings. In addition, only two out of the five meetings had an established culture that led to the functioning of an effective PLC. The other three PLC meetings did lack established norms and practices as well as ineffective communications, which resulted in the observed misusage of the members' time. As for utilizing PLCs to impact the school's culture, only one of the observed meetings mentioned any facet of school culture. From the observations, it seemed that the PLCs at the school under study have some roadblocks for proper usage and sustainment that need to be addressed to allow for the PLCs to be utilized in a manner that leads to positive impacts on not only the school's culture but the success of the school's students.

Pattern-Themes in Findings

The use of analytic coding to examine the data led to the discovery of four common themes. The use of analytic coding allowed me the ability to utilize interpretation and reflection on the meaning of the data to assist in generating the common themes listed described below. The first theme uncovered the importance of norms and practices with the use of PLCs. The second theme dealt with collaboration and teamwork with the use of PLCs. The third theme dealt with communication in PLCs and the school. The fourth them focused on accountability and leadership needed for PLCs.

PLC/PLC Meeting Norms and Practices. The first theme that arose from the data was the significance or necessity for norms and practices when using PLCs and having PLC meetings. It became apparent that utilizing norms and practices was a shortfall for the PLCs at the research site, from the observations with the lack of standards present during these meetings as well as from participant interviews. With having a lack of norms and practices, it was stated by seven participants in the study that the school's culture is negatively affected by the inefficient use of PLCs. Four out of the five observed PLC meetings had regularly scheduled times, and this practice was confirmed from five of the ten participants. However, as for establishing and utilizing norms and practices in the PLCs, it was gathered that seven of the interviewees confirmed a lack of norms and practices as well as three out of five PLC meetings observed did not have a set of established norms or practices they followed. Participant 6

reflected: “These norms and practices associated with our PLCs are forced on to us, and without member development of the norms and practices, I feel that there is a lack of buy-in from the group.” In addition, Participant 7 felt that the purpose and function of the PLCs at the research site were not honestly observed or conveyed by members of the administration. With a lack of established norms and practices, it was evident that the culture of the PLC, at least, was affected by this deficiency of a set of norms and practices. The culture of the PLCs as described by the interviewees and as observed during the PLC meetings does not create a collegial atmosphere where authentic collaboration and communication amongst members is solely directed towards meeting the needs of the students. It was expressed by five out of the 10 interviewees that their PLCs tend to find their way into becoming a gripe session among members about what is going on in their classrooms and the school as a whole. Because of a lack of established norms and practices, the PLCs are perceived to function not at an optimal level where the PLC members operate as a cohesive or collaborative team to meet the goals of the school. In addition, the PLCs at the school under study with their lack of shared norms and practices create a learning environment between members that does not focus on the needed collaborative action research needed to meet the needs of the students but rather become an environment where teachers own interests are put before the needs of the group.

Collaboration and Teamwork, and Support. Collaboration and teamwork were the second themes that developed from the data collected. Participants 1-10 felt that this

theme of having collaboration, teamwork, and support within a PLC is an important facet of effective PLCS and to the point of shaping a school's culture. With the participants stressing this facet of PLCs, it was evident based on off the interviews and observations that mixture of members in each PLC did not necessarily create a cohesive team. The lack of being a cohesive team in the PLCs became apparent during the observations when the three out of the five meetings seemed to break down into a gripe session, and the interactions between the PLC members did not seem to produce the desired goals for the meeting. In addition, the lack of cohesion was reflected by six of the participants that the personalities or even the strong personalities of PLC members can be detrimental to a PLC functioning when these personalities clash within the PLC. A common facet of the PLCs observed and members interviewed was there was a lack of chemistry among the groups, and Participant 4 particularly expressed that "The PLCs feel forced, particularly in variety of new and existing members that have to adjust to the school's culture, which that lack of adjustment can lead to an impact on the culture of the PLC." In addition, Participant 5 reflected in the interview that the teachers not only in the PLCs but the staff felt a disconnect not only among themselves but with the administration as well.

With observing the above about the teamwork of the PLCs, the participants overwhelmingly felt that collaboration in the PLC is a huge benefit of using them at the research site. Six out of the 10 participants felt that collaboration in the PLCs did have a positive influence on their pedagogy and the performance of their students. Participant 3 reflected: "That I am able to continue to learn better ways of doing things in the

classroom by sharing ideas in my PLC." One thing that was consistent among the participants was their view of having collaboration in PLCs must go together with communicating together to utilize their time with the use of PLCs effectively.

Communication. Communication was the third theme that emerged from the data. Communication among the PLCs in this study seemed to be consistent. Some groups were quite effective in communicating with the use of email and collaborative online data sharing. Participant 2 expressed: "PLCs give people the opportunity they normally would not have to communicate with other people and get off my island of a classroom." Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 10 felt when communication is constant and consistent among the PLC members then the PLC tends to be more effective and efficient. A common facet with the communication theme in the use of PLCs was the use of email to be the primary method of communication since it allowed most participants to communicate throughout the day or week without having to step away from the duties in their classrooms. However, it was expressed by many the participants that the communication between some groups and group members was not that consistent, and it was observed that the PLCs that did not communicate effectively seemed to have the hardest time with being effective. In addition, it was mentioned by Participants 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10 that there was a lack of communication from the administration about the use of PLCs and how they should be utilized effectively.

Accountability and Leadership. Accountability and leadership were the final themes that evolved from the data. Six out of the ten participants felt that there was an

overall lack of accountability with the use of the PLCs. While some participants felt that there was a component of responsibility amongst their group members, these PLCs seem to be effectively operated. It did appear that some of the participants did have a real issue with not having any accountability for PLC members who did not show for meetings nor participate in the group's activities or preparations. Participant 10 reflected: "A lack of accountability measures for PLCs can lead to the development of a negative culture within not only PLCs but the school as well." Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, and 10 felt the lack of accountability was a result of a lack of involvement and direction from the leadership or administration of the school or district. Most of the participants felt the administration had quite a bit of responsibility and time issues that get in the way of being involved more with the PLCs at the research site. Participant 4 felt that "a lack of feedback with the use of PLCs is a shortfall at our school and just like in our classrooms how are we to grow without any feedback or observations." Not only did many of the participants feel that there was a lack of involvement, support, and communication from the administration but they felt that there was a lack of knowledge or training associated with the use of PLCs. Particularly Participant 6 reflected that "From the start of my tenure here, I was expected to utilize a PLC(s), but I was never given any training or knowledge on their use besides a couple of posters we have to keep up in our rooms." Five out of the 10 participants felt that a school's culture can be impacted, both positively and negatively, but the use of PLCs without any direction or feedback could cause PLCs to be regularly scheduled gripe sessions rather than an effective use of PLC members'

time.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 I asked, "What aspects of school culture are impacted using Professional Learning Communities?" To find an answer to the first research question, data were collected to investigate the perceptions of the participants, and the functioning of PLC meetings in terms of the impact PLCs have on school culture.

Based on the PLC meeting observations and the participants' perceptions, the impact of PLCs on school culture can be significant. The impact of PLCs on a school's culture can vary from being quite positive to negative, which seemed dependent on the implementation and sustainment of the PLCs within a school. The first theme of having PLC and PLC meeting norms and practices made it abundantly clear that without established norms and practices, the functioning of the PLCs was hindered. The lack of norms and practices from the participants' responses and PLC meeting observations allowed for the PLCs to function at not an optimal level where the PLCs were solely used for action research for creating avenues for student success. Rather, the PLCs were found to be inconsistent and at times inefficient when the norms and practices for functioning as a PLC were not established or followed.

The theme of collaboration, teamwork, and support, as well as communication, fit together when describing the impact PLCs have on a school's culture. When collaboration and support were evident in PLCs, the usage and functioning of the PLCs tended to follow DuFour et al.'s (2008) framework of working in a PLC. However, when

collaboration was lacking or ineffective, the PLC was used in a way that wasted the teachers' time and created a sense of animosity due to the different burden of completing essential tasks for the groups learning units or meeting the needs of their students. It became apparent that even with efficient collaboration between some of the members, the members that did not attend or put any effort into the PLC negatively impacted the culture of the PLC. When this occurs, it translates to a group of individuals with their agendas where the focus helping as many students succeed is abandoned. In addition, when the communication between members of a PLC and with the school as a whole does not occur consistently and efficiently, the goals of the school and the norms of using PLCs seem to become lost in the everyday chaos of meeting the needs of the students. When there is a lack of chemistry and communication between PLC members, the PLC, at times, will be nothing more than a mandated meeting that individuals fret rather than an opportunity to work together to meet a common goal of providing the best learning environment and pedagogy to allow all students to succeed.

Findings indicated that the use of PLCs without accountability and training seem to have an impact on a school's culture, especially when PLCs are more accustomed to becoming a gripe session rather than a productive use of PLC members' time focused on student learning. Without any direction or guidance as well as communication, PLC members will not know how to function as a PLC and more times than not will end as a meeting to complain and waste time discussing non-student or classroom issues. From the participant responses, it became evident that the participants, as well as other teachers

at the school under study, have a desire or a need to be trained in working with a PLC in a manner that is most effective. In addition to a desire to have training on PLCs, it was without a doubt that the participants felt there was a lack of accountability with the use of PLCs. The teachers desired more than just a couple of posters that are put into the classrooms about PLCs. A sense of frustration and annoyance could be felt with most the participants with the lack of accountability with the use of PLCs. By having a lack of accountability or leadership involvement, the PLCs without direction are left on their own to function as a dysfunctional team. The lack of accountability can lead to an overworking of some individuals due to the lack of involvement by some of the PLC members. A lack of accountability directly affects the culture of a PLC as well as the school, since the teachers who choose to function as a PLC develop animosity towards the participation-lacking members and over time, the overall learning environment of the school can be negatively affected by ineffective usage and sustainment of PLCs.

In addition, all the participants did see the value of the use of PLCs within the school and most noted that there is a benefit to PLCs and school culture when there were effective collaboration and communication within PLCS as well as the school as a whole. When a school's PLC function as effective teams that have established norms and practices, collaborate and communicate effectively, and have an accountability measure built into the PLC usage, not only will the school's student successes increase but an environment where all teachers are respected and valued will result.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "How do secondary school teachers perceive the impact school leadership responsibilities have on a school's culture while participating in a PLC?" To answer this question, data was collected during the PLC meeting observations and the participant interviews to examine how school leadership impacts the use of PLCs and a school's culture.

Participant's perceptions on the impact school leadership had on the school culture using PLCs was an overall lack of involvement from the leadership of the school. The lack of involvement was apparent when a lack of established norms and practices were not followed within the PLCs. Even if a PLC created their own norms and practices, it was observed that these were not utilized or followed efficiently. It must be the responsibility of the leadership team to give direction and guidance on the use of any program in a school, especially with the use of PLCs since it involves a large portion of the staff. Without the direction or guidance to implement or sustain PLCs, PLCs will become dysfunctional and the desired results from utilizing PLCs will not be present in the amount of discontent amongst the teachers being obligated to utilize PLCs without the proper support.

The impact of school leadership on PLCs ranged from a lack of attendance in meetings to ensuring that PLCs were holding each other accountable to following up on PLC norms that have been handed down from the leadership itself. As perceived by many of the participants, the lack of involvement and communication with the use of

PLCs did have a negative effect on not only the culture within the PLC as well as the possibility of affecting the overall culture of a school. The lack of effective communication between PLCs and the school leadership not only created confusion amongst PLCs on how to function but created a sense of discontent with their usage. In addition, a lack of guidance or training with the use of PLCs, besides a quick mention in the beginning of the year, has led to, at least the PLCs observed or a PLC an interviewee was a member or mentioned in an interview, a decline in the culture in the PLCs and within most of the school. In addition, it was found during the PLC meeting observations that there was no involvement from any leadership team members and this strengthens the claims made by the participants with the use of data triangulation.

For a PLC to function effectively, teachers need to be trained and supported by an administration or leadership team to sustain their usage over time. Without the support and guidance, PLCs will become formal meeting times used for an informal function, such as becoming a gripe session on what is causing discontent amongst teachers instead of a group that functions on action research to achieve an increase in student successes. With the use of participant responses and PLC meeting observations, a PLC learning opportunity or training session be provided to the school under study to further develop the teachers on how to function as a PLC to achieve better success in the classroom and to reduce the amount of discontent amongst teachers that has led to teachers leaving the school.

Data and Discrepant Cases

While conducting any research study, researchers must be aware of that any instant discrepant data may emerge during the data collection or analysis. The findings section must include relevant information such as any discrepancies to effectively convey the discoveries. Merriam (2009) mentioned that a wide range of data might present dissimilar, discordant, and contradictory findings and this discrepant data must be carefully analyzed and managed in a study. I analyzed all the data in this study to deal with possible discrepant cases.

Throughout the course of the study, discrepant data did emerge in some of the data. As for the data describing the perceptions of the school's culture two participants did not believe the culture of the school has changed. Participant 2 felt the school was terrific and felt supported, even though many of the participants felt the contrary. Participant 1 reflected: "In my tenure, I feel the culture has not changed and is pretty consistent." In addition, to lack of evidence of a changing school culture, I found that Participant 9 had a limited knowledge of school culture and it seemed she was discussing more school spirit rather than the educational culture of the school. In Participant 9's case, I asked the participant to expand on the responses to school culture put without any prodding, the participant could not fully expand on the question. While there were participants who did have a limited knowledge of school culture or a differing opinion of the school's culture, it was important to take into consideration all the data from the participant responses. Being able to acknowledge discrepant cases or data was

paramount to understanding teacher's perceptions since attention must be given to any information that contrasts with other cases.

Summary of Outcomes

As depicted in this section, data from the observations and interviews were utilized to recognize shared patterns and themes. The research questions were utilized to gather a further understanding of the topics of PLCs and school culture. The summary of the outcomes is arranged per the research questions that directed this project study.

Research Question 1 I asked, "What aspects of school culture are impacted using Professional Learning Communities?" The use of the interview responses and PLC meeting observations made it clear that when PLCs are not utilized in a manner that utilizes shared norms and practices, effective collaboration and communication, and has the support from the administration, the PLCs will not function to fullest potential and come up short in meeting the goals of the school and best serving the students. The culture of the school can be impacted using PLCs but can easily be affected towards the negative impacting the learning environments of the school. When shared norms and practices, support, collaboration, and accountability provided by the school leadership team, PLCs will not sustain in a way that promotes a culture within a PLC or school that creates the best learning environment and pedagogy to meet the needs of students.

Research Question 2 asked, "How do secondary school teachers perceive the impact school leadership responsibilities have on a school's culture while participating in a PLC?" The study participants' interview responses and PLC meeting observations

made it clear that a lack of involvement from the school leadership with PLCs can affect a school's culture for the negative. With a lack of direction and guidance, PLCs follow a path that does meet the goals of the school and meet the needs of the students. To prevent the PLCs from being formal gripe sessions, the administration or school leadership team needs to help establish norms and practices with using PLCs and an accountability measure that helps with effective PLC usage and member participation. If the teachers are frustrated with the use of PLCs, this discontent will carry over into the classroom making the teacher less effective in their creation a learning environment that meets the needs of students to allow them to grow and succeed.

A professional development opportunity was a possible solution to the problem of PLCs and school culture. Having trained on the use of PLCs can lead to more efficient PLCs, which in the end could have a positive impact on the school's culture. The training opportunity will focus on the creation and implementation of norms and practices with the use of PLCs, the development of an accountability method, and developing collaboration skills and opportunities. Through this inquiry into the experiences of ten high school teachers and five observations of PLC meetings, it was evident that the PLCs at the research site needed a refocusing on their usage and vision as well as how it can impact school culture.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

Section 3 describes the project that was created to act as a solution to the problem recognized in Section 1. Section 3 also includes the project goals and delivers a reason for the project based on the data collected and analyzed in Section 2. The section offers a rationale for the project endorsed by a literature review and implementation steps. In addition, the section describes a schedule for implementation of the project, a plan for evaluating the project, and a discourse on possible suggestions for social change that the project is intended to do. All project-related documents are included in Appendix A.

The project created to tackle the research problem described in section 1 is a professional development opportunity focusing on PLC knowledge and implementation as well as how the use of PLCs can affect a school's culture. The primary focus of the opportunity is to refocus the staff on the facts and usage of PLCs in a way that promotes learning for all students (DuFour et al., 2008). The proposed professional development opportunity will be delivered over a three-day period. There will be separate one-day training for leadership team members, a one-day training for teachers, and a one-day session with all members of the faculty including all the leadership team and teachers.

Project Goals

The project to address the problem recognized in this study will come in the form of a professional development opportunity/training. The function of this professional development opportunity is to train or retrain teachers on the use and vision of PLCs and

how PLCs can impact a school's culture. The goals of this project intend to not only impact teachers that utilize PLCs but to refocus the leadership team on their use and accountability as well. The opportunity's main goal is to provide the teachers and administrators with the necessary know-how pertaining to PLCs to understand their function and effective practices. In addition, the professional development provides a time for teachers and administrators to collaborate with their colleagues. The last goal of this professional development opportunity is to allow for support and accountability measures to be addressed for the implementation of effective PLCs.

Rationale

The project was selected due to the literature review in Section 1 that showed a need for teachers to know how to apply and sustain PLCs in a way that created a culture in a school that promoted learning for all students. The project genre was also chosen based on the data analysis from Section 2 that pointed towards a need for training on PLCs sustainment and how to use PLCs to create a culture conducive to learning at school under study.

The data analyzed in Section 2 showed there was a need for teachers to understand how to employ PLCs effectively and efficiently in a way that creates a school culture conducive to student and teacher learning. The data analysis showed that there were some disconnects with the use of PLCs at the school under study. PLCs and the norms or practices associated with it, communication between members as well as between administration and PLC members, ineffective collaboration, and guidance or

training from the leadership team on the usage of PLCs, especially for new teachers to the school. Overall, the teachers need to be educated on the use of PLCs that allows for their sustainment and how the usage of these PLCs could affect the school's culture. Subsequently, this project corresponded with the data collected and showed a need to improve upon and refocus the current usage of PLCs at the school under study.

This project was selected for numerous reasons. First, it encompasses a training opportunity with a specialist on PLCs using existing data to acquaint the leadership team and PLC members on the function of PLCs and the importance of leadership with PLCs. Second, the project was chosen because it encompasses a professional development involving how teachers can learn from each other. By allowing, PLC leaders and department chairs to present to PLC teams of teachers, the PLC members are more likely to connect to the information and learn from it. It has been shown that with educational innovations or attempting to implement something new, teachers often struggle to translate the newly acquired knowledge and skills to their classroom practices (Sjoer & Meirnik, 2016, p. 111). Lastly, the project allows for an opportunity for the leadership team to focus on PLCs and leading them to be utilized in an efficient manner positively affecting the school. The leadership sessions give the leadership team an opportunity to reflect on efficient leadership and guidance as it pertains to implementing or sustaining PLCs to improve the culture of the school.

The project addresses the problem in numerous ways. The problem identified was an insufficiency of teacher knowledge on the usage and sustainment of PLCs in a

manner that positively affects the culture of the school under study. Data collected revealed that the current PLCs could not be effective without an awareness from the teachers on the usage and sustainment of PLCs and how individuals fit into the efficient operation of PLCs. During the professional development opportunity, a guest speaker who is an expert on PLCs could be an effective method to deliver the information to the leadership team on how to implement and guide the PLCs to positively impact the school's culture. The problem is further explored by using peer-learning with teachers training their peers. When teachers witness their colleagues discoursing issues pertaining to their classrooms and pedagogy, those teachers can connect to the information making it more relevant by pertaining to the issues at hand for the group. The goal of the professional development is to utilize the past practices of teachers working with their colleagues and being involved in the follow-up discussions will advance the current PLCs in the school under study. The content of the project addresses the issue of norms and practices, collaboration, and leadership associated with Professional Learning Communities. The project may be an answer to the problem at the school under study.

Review of the Literature

From the literature, there are various barriers to implementing PLCs effectively in a way that affects school culture (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Hairon & Dimmock, 2012; Stegall & Linton, 2012; Teague & Anfara, 2012). In this study, I ascertained the following affected the implementation and sustainment of PLCs that impacts school culture in the school under study: (1) PLC and PLC meeting norms and practices, (2)

collaboration, teamwork, and support, (3) communication, and (4) accountability and leadership. To address the problems, the project will consist of a 1-day training for the leadership team, including administration, department chairs, PLC leaders, and identified teacher-leaders, a 1-day training for the rest of the faculty, and a 1-day training for the whole faculty including the leadership team.

To foster the creation of the project study, I carried out a review of the literature related to my project genre, professional development, and the content of my project, PLCs, and school culture. The literature review for the proposed professional development opportunity focuses on how to employ best professional development that impacts student learning and permits teachers to hold on to applicable knowledge and skills learned. In addition, it also focuses on the identified themes from section 2 as potential barriers to be addressed in the professional development opportunity to effectively demonstrate and review how the use of PLCs impacts the school's culture. As part of the literature review, peer-reviewed articles were selected with the used of the following databases: SAGE Publications, Thoreau, ERIC, ProQuest Central, Education Research Complete, and EBSCOHost. The following terms were used: *professional development, school culture, PLCs, collaboration, communities of practice, effective professional development, PLC professional development, teacher professional learning, and learning communities.* A mixture of Boolean phrases and databases offered me with the material to reach a level of saturation in the literature.

Effective Professional Development

Teachers are lifelong learners by the nature of the profession in a continuous path of improving upon their pedagogy and classroom skills. Through the history of public education, professional development opportunities for teachers have been and still are offered in a variety of formats (Koellner & Jacobs, 2015; Kuijpers, Houtveen, & Wubbels, 2010). Nevertheless, professional development needs to include active learning for teachers, be continuous and constant, consistent with school improvement plans, collaborative, and job-embedded (Desimone, 2011; Simon, Campbell, Johnson, & Styliandiou, 2011). The goal of education is the learning of participants involved including students and teachers. Student learning can be improved with the use of professional development for teachers that focus not only on content but pedagogical skills (Wallace, 2014). The rationale of professional development is to increase the quality of teachers' pedagogy and classroom environments (Groves & Ronnerman, 2012). Professional development or professional learning is needed for teachers to reflect and strengthen their knowledge and skills regularly as well as successfully prepare for educating students for the 21st Century Workforce (Hough, 2011; Teague & Anfara, 2012). Most professional development utilized and offered recently is based on the needs of not only the students but the teachers as well (Main & Pendergast, 2015).

Collopy (2015) found that some professional developments offered can be ineffective as well as disconnected from school goals, teacher needs, and the realities of teachers' work and increasing responsibilities. Collopy stated that professional

development properly carried out and revisited the "ability to serve as a bridge between current and improved practice by building on teachers' strengths and directly addressing areas of weakness" (p. 13). It has been found through research that effective professional development must support educational improvement efforts, target challenges to teachers' content area and pedagogical skills, connect to the realities of teacher work, and provide sustained support to ensure lasting change (Collopy 2015; Hough, 2011; Main & Pendergast, 2015).

Since teachers are the key factor when it comes to impacting student performance, teacher professional development programs should have an emphasis on improving teacher quality (Gibson & Brooks, 2011; Kuijpers, Houtveen, & Wubbels, 2010). However, it has been uncovered that many times professional development presented to teachers is mandated from above with not having the best interest of student learning or improving pedagogy in a way that provides meaningful change (Roseler & Dentzau, 2013). Simon et al. (2011) found that teachers need to be actively involved in the professional development that requires teachers to change their practices and beliefs as a part of the process. When teachers are more active, professional developments for teachers are "more likely to be effective if underpinned with an understanding of teacher learning and educational change (Simon et al., 2011, p. 6). Thus, I have developed a learning opportunity that involves the whole faculty including the leadership team, PLC leaders, teacher leaders, department chairs, and the rest of the teaching staff.

Professional development considered effective or successful needs to be ongoing, collaborative, data and interest drove in design, and interactive for not only the facilitators but the participants as well (Lutrick & Szabo, 2012). The National Staff Development Council (2011) supports the finding of Lutrick and Szabo (2012) with the ascertainment that professional development opportunities provided should consider the following components when successfully planning a learning opportunity: (1) learning communities, (2) leadership, (3) resources, (4) data, (5) learning design, (6) implementation and (7) outcomes (NCSD, 2011). In addition, Bash and D'Auria (2012) found that professional development that manages to improve student learning must focus on content or subject-area knowledge, pedagogical strategies, active learning, collaboration, and critical reflection. Bibbo and d'Erizans (2014) support the previous researchers by stating "professional learning or development should link directly to improved student outcomes, and such opportunities need to focus on increasing teachers' pedagogical skills, engages teachers in active learning, collaboration, feedback, and reflection over time" (p. 29). Garet et al. (2001) described important facets of effective professional development being content focused, active learning, coherent, having a sufficient duration or exposure to the participants, and collective participation (as cited in Lee & Buxton, 2013, p. 112). In addition, professional development opportunities are found to be effective when the learning activities included "examining data on student progress, analyzing student work, determining effective strategies to facilitate learning,

designing and critiquing lessons, and developing common assessments for the classroom to measure progress" (Mindich & Lieberman, 2012, p. 12).

When looking to plan, or implement an effective professional development or learning opportunity, it is imperative to ensuree that the learning is well-matched with both state initiatives and connects to the teachers' pedagogy to make sure that it is relevant and can be utilized in the individual classroom (Stewart, 2014). To ensure professional development meets the needs of a faculty and school or district, it is recommended by Desimone (2009) and Stewart (2014) that professional development activities attempt to be job-embedded, guided by data, attentive on student work and progress, ensure an active learning environment, and occur over time to allow for application and critical reflection cycle to occur. In addition, effective professional development needs to be provided in a manner that is significant and appropriate with the use of active learning, modeling, and collaboration (Huber, 2010; Perkins, 2010). By creating professional learning opportunities that are focused on educator and student learning, "a development of more adaptive, flexible, independent, and self-regulating learners to enable them to live and work in a fast-changing world" (Livingston, 2012, p. 162) can only occur with the appropriate growth and development of innovative teachers with use effective and relevant learning opportunities. Gibson and Brooks (2011) found that professional learning opportunities found to be effective were coherent and connected to the school and classroom goals, content-focused, focused on the needs of teachers, utilized active learning with the use of collaboration and modeling, provided

opportunities for implementation and feedback, and most importantly supported by the administration. In addition, it is acknowledged that creating a culture of learning in schools with the use of professional learning opportunities was beneficial when learning from peers occurs in active and authentic environments (Fullan, Cuttress, & Kilcher, 2005). Gibson and Brooks (2011) explain the importance of support for professional development directly from school leadership to allow for the participating teachers to feel supported, inspired, and validated will lead to changes in teacher practices because of the learning opportunity. The focus for teacher professional development should be finding ways to address and support the needs of teachers in a manner where professional autonomy is not at risk of being eroded (Gibson & Brooks, 2011; Hargreaves, 2010).

PLCs and Professional Development

Professional Learning Communities are defined by DuFour et al. (2008) as "educators committed to working collaboratively in the ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve" (p. 14). PLCs are an organizational model used to help all students succeed by allowing "teachers to learn together to improve their practice" (Fulton & Britton, 2011, p. 7). Effectively utilized PLCs have are characterized as a method to provide support and trust among teachers, having a shared vision and values, focused on teacher and student growth, and an inquiry-based approach to work collectively to improve the learning experience of all students (Marzano, Heflebower, Hoegh, Warrick, & Grift, 2016). PLCs provide a substantial change from traditional educational models by allowing teachers to

collaborate as teams or groups to positively impact student learning in a way that utilizes time efficiently (Elbousty & Bratt, 2010).

Professional Learning Communities have been emphasized in in the past decade due to benefits outweighing the negatives of utilizing it since it has been shown that working together as teachers seems to produce better results than working alone (Marzano, 2016). Working collaboratively and providing a means of critical reflection on the pedagogy of the PLC members has an impact on the overall experience of learning for their students (Morrissey, 2000; Thornton & Cherrington, 2014). As for the benefits for teachers who work in a PLC, researchers have studied PLCs as a means of providing professional learning, collaborating and sharing best practices, professional growth, an increase in pedagogical skills, and a greater satisfaction with the careers of teachers by providing more efficient and sustainable learning (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Additionally, students have benefited from teachers who work in PLCs by having improved student outcomes and achievement (Fulton & Britton, 2011; Marzano et al., 2016). For PLCs to thrive in any school environment, the implementation and sustainment of PLCs must be supported by the leadership team involved. Promoting and supporting PLCs within a school has seen benefits for leaders evolving as increased leaders' ability to support teacher development and student achievement, enhance interactions between school leaders and teachers, and having a direct influence on the PLC teams (Lee, Louis & Anderson, 2012; Lewis, Baker, Watts, & Lang, 2014). It has been researched and evidenced that the benefits of using PLCs can be tremendous but to

achieve these results the PLCs must be implemented in a fashion that provides sufficient training on their use and expectations. To provide this training for the school within this study, I am suggesting a 3-day professional opportunity on the sustainment of PLCs and how the PLC affects the school's culture.

To provide any professional learning opportunities or development a leader must recognize that professional learning will occur when the training is job-embedded, engages teacher in work, collaborative, connected to the goals of the school, and is assessed based on the results (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). By using Professional Development (PD) to establish or sustain PLCs within a school, the opportunity provides a means of building capacity on PLC knowledge and usage (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). In addition to strengthening the capacity of teachers to utilize PLCs, leadership members have their capacity building by following through with the facets taught during the professional development and using it in the job-embedded challenges that are linked to teachers' work and the school's goals for improvement (DuFour et al., 2010). Since schools have a need to improve based upon mandated measures, the use professional development with PLCs provide a more readily-available, focused, and practical learning opportunity (Lewis et al., 2014).

The use of PDs to increase the practices of teachers in terms of using PLCs must happen in a manner where teachers feel that PD and the use of PLCs are worthy practice and a beneficial use of their time (Spencer, 2016). Using PD's to help train on the use of PLCs has worked when the work is supported, and the participants and the PLCs value

their thinking as well as reflective practice to build pedagogical capacity (Owens, 2010). Stakey (2009) found that professional development of teachers in PLCs must be "viewed as an extension of pre-service teacher education in ensuring, whether novice or seasoned, have up to date knowledge needed to be effective" (p. 186). In addition, Bayar (2014) found that effective PDs on the use of PLCs must match existing teacher needs, match existing school needs, have been planned or designed with the input of teachers, provides active participation or demonstrations, and provides long-term engagement. However, with any PD opportunity in recent years, the PD must shift from a mode of knowledge transmission and towards a professional learning approach when it comes to sustaining PLCs (Ho, Lee, & Teng, 2016). With the PD opportunities focused on PLCs as well as many other topics, the PD must be utilized as an instrument for teachers' professional learning, attentive on student outcomes, cooperative in practice, and tie into the goals of the school (McGarr & McCormack, 2014).

PLCs have been evidenced to be effective when a PD opportunity has been used to ensure transmission of knowledge and skills when it comes to sharing practices, cultivating involvement and leadership opportunities within PLCs, nurturing respectful and trusting relationships, promoting collaborative inquiry and reflection, and supporting the use of PLCs (Thornton & Cherrington, 2014). Using PDs for implementing PLCs, Hairon, Goh, and Chua (2015) stated that "teacher-led action can be manifested by teacher collegial relations, collaborative engagement, and learning with a shared purpose of improving practice and student learning" (p. 12), which provides a process for open

dialogue, reciprocal trust, and continuous improvement on educators' pedagogy (Chen, Lee, Lin, & Zhang, 2016). With using PD to instruct on PLCs, the PD must be directed and effective, since it has been found that just "simply putting well-meaning individuals together and expecting them to collaborate is not enough" (Thessin & Starr, 2011, p. 52) and these PDs must show how to utilize collaboration to promote inquiry and critical reflection in a way that promotes learning for all students (Popp & Goldman, 2016).

PLC Norms and Practices

The use of PLCs without any direction or training can lead to dysfunction and devolve of PLC groups that end up being becoming nothing more than a scheduled time to gripe (Marzano et al., 2016). By providing a professional development opportunity for the implementation and sustainment of PLCs, educators can discover the norms and practices that are necessary to utilize PLCs in an effective and efficient manner. Marzano et al. (2016) described group norms as "the broad descriptors of the behaviors in which all members of the schoolwide effort will engage" (p. 17). Subsequently, DuFour et al. (2008) stated a norm is a "standard set of patterns of behaviors and attitudes that represent a collective commitment individuals make to on another, so their work is more rewarding and effective" (p. 284). In addition, norms can be considered a set of fundamentals or traditions that direct a group or PLC (DuFour et al., 2010).

When established norms and practices are used in a PLC, groups are more likely to perform efficiently when these norms and practices are clarified in terms of expectations relating to procedures, responsibilities, and relationships (DuFour et al.,

2010). By revisiting establishing norms and practices in a PD opportunity with sustaining PLCs, resistance to participating among members can be reduced and thus aids in creating a responsive dialogue (Elbousty & Bratt, 2010). Creating shared norms and practices allows members to focus more on the learning of students and maintaining a clear focus on what needs to be applied to establish an educational environment favorable to learning rather than becoming a struggle for participation and collaboration (Barton & Stepanek, 2012).

Establishing norms and practice within a PLC is necessary for the functioning of the group in a manner that provides opportunities for individuals to be involved in the learning progression. By identifying shared norms and practices, PLCs can add new members throughout the year or at the beginning of each subsequent year without pause, since the inner workings of the group have already been recognized (MacPhail, Patton, Parker, & Tannehill, 2014). The use of shared, established norms and practices allows teachers to share the responsibilities of the group to allow for a collective sense of contributions to student learning opportunities (Ho, Lee, & Teng, 2016). Teachers who engaged in establishing norms and practices within a PLC allow for more time in the group dedicated to the analysis of teaching and learning of both the students as well as teachers (Dogan, Pringle, & Mesa, 2016). In addition, trust and efficacy in the group can be created with the establishment of shared norms and practices, which aids in the sustainment and sustenance of PLCs in schools (Gray & Summers, 2015). Lastly, the use of shared standards and practices in a PLC allows for room for the capacities and

relationships developed among members to be able to work productively together trying to obtain the goal of providing the best education possible for all students (Gray, 2011).

Collaboration

When working in a PLC, it is essential to create a collaborative culture to ensure a fully functional PLC that leads to a real change to student learning and success (Williams & Hierck, 2015). Collaboration in PLCs can be considered "collegial and supportive interactions between teachers to foster sharing of information and advice on instruction" (Bryk et al., 2013, p. 54). DuFour et al. (2008) support the importance and definition of collaboration in PLCs by stating "that collaborative teams are the fundamental building block of an organization or PLC that maintains members working interdependently to achieve common goals and holding each other mutually accountable" (p. 15). When educators work collaboratively rather than in isolation and ensure collective responsibility, schools and PLCs experienced the true benefit of utilizing PLCs, which is higher levels of learning for all students (Brodie, 2014; Williams & Hierck, 2015). The use of effective collaboration and shared responsibilities lead to teachers working together to solve not only problems but complex tasks as well (Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, & Box, 2014). Collaboration is a means of tapping into social capital that is considered a prerequisite for PLCs while developing reflective incidents and appreciative inquiry (Allen, 2013).

When establishing a collaborative culture, teachers will work together, interdependently to review professional practices to enhance student learning (Carpenter,

2015). Lieberman and Miller (2016) reflected on collaboration in PLCs as "a way for members to develop norms and hold each other accountable to the group" (p. 16). Since high-quality teaching has been tied to student achievement, the use of collaborative PLCs has been found to contribute to the sustainable progress in student learning (Harris & Jones, 2010; Harris & Sass, 2011). Hallam et al. (2015) found that "well-developed PLC teams cultivate formal collaboration from the setting of goals, articulating outcomes, and planning future actions as they consider student data" (p. 195). In addition, Carpenter (2015) expanded on the use of collaboration that requires voluntary participation from members involved in "support goals, responsibilities, accountability, and resources" (p. 690). When PLCs have a foundation with effective collaborative methods, teachers can enhance teachers' knowledge and practices while challenging the notions of individualism in education to produce obtainable student learning and professional goals (Makopoulou & Armour, 2014). Marzano (2013) expanded on the conditions for collaboration to occur in PLCs as "teachers need to participate in the authentic interaction that includes openly sharing both failures and mistakes to possess the ability to respectfully and constructively analyze and criticize practices and that promote self-reflection" (p. 61).

Accountability and Leadership

When a program or reorganization in a school is implemented, such as Professional Learning Communities, it is imperative that effective accountability and leadership are present (Anfara & Mertens, 2012; Blanton & Perez, 2011). Demands from

not only a district and educational department but the community as well have influenced understandings about the purposes for PLCs, the practices of the groups of PLCs, and the direction of PLC efforts (Allen, 2013). Accountability for change that benefits students is what happens in classrooms and the school leading to academic improvement as well as classroom and school cultures that support learning (Easton, 2016). Since PLCs utilize not only resources but people capital, PLCs groups must account for how they are using their time (Spencer, 2016). In addition, PLCs need to be held accountable to deliver significant changes in the classroom, so culture is created leading to more student successes (Easton, 2016). Accountability can be accomplished by maintaining notes that express the goal, a summary of accomplishments, and ideas for the next time the group meets (DuFour et al., 2008; Spencer, 2016). Easton (2016) explained that accountability in PLCs could be informal, such as having established norms that are followed, meeting with other PLC delegates to discuss PLC matters, and assessing if what they are doing is working by having the hard conversations, and formal with looking at the evidence, such as artifacts, data, and student work. Having accountability built in the implementation and sustainment of PLCs can lead to educational decisions and actions that make a difference for student learning.

A facet of accountability in PLCs that leads to PLCs members acting with stewardship and service towards education is the collective responsibility (Easton, 2016; Williams & Hierck, 2015). DuFour and Mattos (2013) expressed the need for collective responsibility by stating “the key to improved student learning is to ensure good teaching

in more classrooms more of the time with the creation of a collaborative culture and collective responsibility of a PLC" (p. 37). Collective responsibility refers to "teachers' willingness to take responsibility for the learning of their students as well as the students throughout the whole school" (Qian, Youngs, & Frank, 2013, p.446). Collective responsibility essentially is the purpose and goal of PLCs when they are implemented in a school seeking educational change for not only their students but the faculty as well. Collective responsibility leads to more collaboration and communication among members about what is working and what needs to be adjusted in terms of student learning (Easton, 2015). With the use of collective responsibility in PLCs, the members are provided a structure where student data is reviewed and utilized by teachers to focus implementing best practices by holding each member accountable (Smith, 2012). In addition, PLCs with active participants feel as if being a change-maker and by having collective responsibility emphasized in PLCs, members were accountable to their colleagues to not only prepare for meetings but perform in the classroom (Richmond & Manokore, 2010).

In addition to collective responsibility as a part of PLC accountability, reciprocal accountability between the faculty and the leadership team or administration is paramount. Reciprocal accountability, as described by DuFour et al. (2010), is when "school leaders call upon others to engage in new work, achieve new standards, and accomplish new goals, leadership teams have a responsibility to develop the capacity of those they lead to be successful in meeting these challenges" (p. 127). Developing the

capacity of teachers in PLCs requires the commitment of the school to provide the teachers with the tools needed to implement and sustain change efforts that are aligned in a way that supports the school's instructional goals (Anfara & Mertens, 2012). In addition, Anfara and Mertens (2012) expand on this commitment with stating "during a reform effort, priority must be given to assessing teacher skills and interests, determining professional needs, and creating a plan for providing teachers with the resources and skills necessary to be successful in not only PLCs but in any new programs or district demands" (p. 62). To ensure reciprocal accountability is apparent in schools and PLCs, a dialog must be present asking the why, what, how, when, guiding, quality, and assurance questions to allow for a two-way exchange of information with people throughout an organization (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). By having these conversations, a school and its PLCs can ensure that the focus is on the needs of students and what teachers require to ensure an increase in student learning and successes.

To make sure that PLCs are accountable, leadership must be present not only to guide the usage of PLCs but to allow members to lead them from the inside out. The role of leadership in any school or PLC is to initiate and sustain the improvement process of a school, PLC, or classroom instruction (DuFour et al., 2008). High-performing leaders have been identified with the following characteristics: 1) questions the status quo, 2) builds trust with clear communications and expectations, 3) creates a collectively owned plan for achievement, 4) focuses on the group, 5) sense of urgency as it pertains to change and sustainable results, 6) commits to continuous self-improvement, and 7) builds

external networks and partnerships (Kirtman, 2013). Williams and Hierck (2015) state "leadership in a school and PLCs should be done in teams where the right people are chosen to be on these teams, and the leaders must guarantee the function, purpose, and processes of the teams" (p. 36). Members of a leadership team need to develop goals and make tough choices through a process of building shared knowledge and consensus (Williams and Hierck, 2015). DuFour and Fullan (2013) described the role of leadership in a school and PLC as "providing a continuity of direction for a school or PLC to provide a collective commitment to continuous improvement leading to obtainable and sustaining results" (p. 71). Leadership in a school needs to help teachers and other school leaders to understand the abilities and competencies needed to be a functional PLC (Kirtman, 2013). In addition, DuFour et al. (2010) found that leaders in a school that utilize PLCs as an organization model need to build capacity for teacher-leaders to lead in the PLC process.

Principals or school leaders can foster a school culture where PLCs flourished by forming leadership teams, share responsibilities to help with helping all students, providing time for collaboration, providing a purpose and focus for PLCs, and ensuring the needed resources are provided for a PLC to succeed (DuFour & Mattos, 2013). In addition, school leaders are tasked with creating opportunities for improving professional learning and development as the main component of school advancement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Cherkowski (2016) argues that school leaders should "cultivate three forms of capital essential for improving teaching in all schools such as human capital,

social capital, and decision-making capital" (p.526). To meet these needs, research suggest that the use of leadership teams or distributed/dispersed leadership allows for the building of leadership capacity of school to lead from within the school to strive for the goal of unremitting improvement (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour et al., 2010; Vanablaere & Devos, 2016; Wang, 2016).

Distributed leadership is a necessary facet of PLCs and schools to function in a manner where there are multiple leaders and leadership activities to have a joint inquiry to aid in generating changes in teaching and learning (Wang, 2016). Distributed or dispersed leadership as defined by DuFour et al. (2008) is

> "leadership that is widely distributed throughout a school rather than vested in a person or position with an emphasis placed on developing the capacity of people throughout a school to assume leadership roles and to become a leader of leaders or a teacher-leader" (p.466).

The use of distributed leadership within a school and in PLCs allows for the equal consideration of the input of its members to allow for a collaborative effort in discovering solutions to school, PLC, and student needs (Sjoer & Meirink, 2016). Kennedy et al. (2011) described the characteristics of distributed leadership that led to the evolution of successful schools focusing on student learning through collaboration as "having leaders that recognize internal intellectual and experiential resources, provides differentiated top-down and lateral decision-making processes, and ensures culture building through dialog and collective inquiry" (p.21). A result of utilizing distributed leadership is the

development of teacher-leaders within a PLC and school. The leadership of teacher-leaders has been considered the glue that holds PLCs together to ensure that all members are brought into the fold and are empowered to provide significant contributions to the group as well as the school (Sharicz & Lees, 2014). By utilizing distributed leadership in schools, school leaders allow for a sense of ownership by each member of the school or PLC which adds to continuous improvement of the school and its culture (Sharicz & Lees, 2014). Schools and PLCs using distributed leadership as a paradigm to improve pedagogy and scholarship allow for the building of capacity for their members to not only become better in their educational skills but to increase their leadership potential that can impact a school's culture.

Project Description

The proposed professional development opportunity will instruct teachers and school leaders on the information about and competent use of PLCs as well as effective leadership and support for using PLCs in a manner that could positively affect school culture. In this study, I made observations of PLC meetings and interviewed 10 teachers who are in a subject-based PLC to determine their perceptions of the impact PLCs have on a school's culture. Findings from the data analysis suggested a need for teachers and school leaders to understand the practice and sustainment of PLCs better. At the school under study, PLCs are currently implemented but based on the data analysis the PLCs are being used in a way that is adversely affecting the culture of the school. The leadership of the school as well as the district office should address the usage of PLCs in schools to

have a constructive influence on student and teacher learning as well as the school culture. The proposed professional development offers the leadership team guidance on utilizing PLCs and providing support for the teachers involved to make their usage more efficient and sustainable. In addition, the project provides teachers the chance to be trained on PLCs and how the use of PLCs could affect the school's culture. The proposed project seeks to address how teachers may employ effective PLCs and the impact on school culture through their usage. The professional opportunity needs to involve active learning for the leadership team and teachers and allow for an environment to promote collaborative, peer-learning (Marzano et al., 2016; Stewart, 2014). Although the themes of norms and practices, collaboration, communication, and leadership support were discovered in the interviews and observations, the professional development opportunity is designed to focus on the issues of effective norms and practices, collaboration, and leadership support. The proposed professional development is projected to improve the current PLCs at the school under study. This professional development provides teachers with an opportunity to learn more about the essential functions of PLCs and what is required of them in their PLCs to make a possible impact on the culture of the school as well as their involved PLCs.

The proposed professional development opportunity will occur on three staff development days at the beginning of the next school year. The proposal and approval process to present this professional development opportunity will occur at the end of the current school year to provide enough time allocate the necessary learning spaces and

resources during the summer break. The project will take place in the media center and auditorium of the school under study. The first day's sessions are intended for the school leadership team, consisting of the administration, department chairs, and PLC leads, and a guest speaker. The guest speaker, who will be a professional learning specialist, will discuss what makes PLCs effective in terms of function and sustainability. In addition, the facilitator and a designated administrator for the professional development opportunity will discuss the school's data with the leadership team as well as the facilitator leading activities and discussions on leadership and accountability with PLCs and adult learning. The second day of the professional development opportunity provides sessions for the other staff members involved in the first day's sessions. The facilitator will guide sessions including activities and discussions for the participants that include the topics of PLC knowledge and skills, best practices associated with PLCs, effective collaboration, and reviewing examples of efficient PLCs. The third and final day of the professional development opportunity is intended to combine the leadership team and teachers involved in PLCs to review the essential facets of PLCs and to go through activities and collaborative discussion on school culture. In addition, on the third day of this learning opportunity, the last session of the day provides an opportunity for follow-up discussions on the first and second day's sessions.

Implementation, Potential Resources, and Existing Supports

If this professional development opportunity is to be effective, it must emphasize on the norms and practices, collaboration, and leadership support. The implementation of

this project would be part of the beginning of the year in-service for the upcoming year. Furthermore, the teachers that were a part of this study would get a chance to participate in the 3-day professional development opportunity. At the school where the proposed project would be implemented there are additional resources that are available in the form of established PLC meeting days during the school week for continued use of the material covered in the project and the school calendar has pre-determined professional development days to follow-up during the year. As the high school teachers are returning from their summer break and starting the new school year, they tend to meet within their departments and the current years PLCs, due to some teachers' schedules changing from the previous school year. The professional development opportunity can help teachers understand how to effectively collaborate and communicate with their co-workers and learn the critical know-hows to function as an effective and sustaining PLC. For this project to do well, it is my responsibility to employ the 3-day professional development opportunity involving the following steps: (a) obtain permission from the school principal, (b) design the 1-day training session specific to the leadership team, (c) formulate the 1-day training specific for the teachers involved in PLCs, (d) coordinate the 1-day training session with the whole group to connect the information discussed on PLCs to school culture, (e) make sure the sessions include pertinent and valid information on PLCs and school culture, and (f) analyze the results of the professional development to allow for growth and effectiveness of the opportunity.

First, it is imperative that the support of the administration is apparent to the staff. Since for any professional development to occur where the participants take something away from it, it must be of the utmost importance to ensure this opportunity happens in a positive environment. When an administrator endorses the teachers in a professional development opportunity, the teachers will understand the importance of the topics covered and are more likely to migrate these to their classrooms. The administration will supply the location, resources, equipment, and necessary funding for this opportunity. The equipment needed for this professional development will consist of a laptop, projector, presentation screen, and SMART board for the PowerPoint presentation. Before the professional development occurred, I made make sure the material covered connects with the requirements of the teachers. The proposed professional opportunity's content was selected and substantiated by the data collected and analyzed from the PLC meeting observations and the teacher interviews. The training sessions are composed of various activities and I was responsible for finding and booking a guest speaker for the training for the leadership team, prepare the presentation material, prepare the handouts, create and provide the name badges for the participants, create a sign-in sheet for the participants, secure and set up the refreshments, and develop an evaluation for the participants to fill out about the professional learning opportunity.

The next step will be to carry out the professional development opportunity integrating facets of effective PLC usage that promotes it sustainment and how it impacts a school's culture. After delivering the professional development sessions, an evaluation

must be administered to the participants. During the project, both summative and formative evaluations will be utilized to determine the effectiveness and the level of relevance the material ties into the current usage of PLCs. I will utilize a formative assessment to gauge the impact of the training sessions.

Possible potential barriers to this project include teacher discontentment for the project. The teachers may feel that the professional development is not needed. In addition, the school may not be able to source the project completely to allow for appropriate implementation. Subsequently, the timing of the project may also be a potential barrier due to the time of the year for the proposed implementation and teachers are attempting to get ready for the new year. To combat the potential barriers in implementing this project, the administration could explain before the current school is out for the summer, that the training will occur during the in-service week in August to allow for teachers to start getting things together for the next school year. Having prior notification will allow for the participants to have an idea of what is going to happen the following year and have a chance to look over material about PLCs to prepare as well as do some preparation for the next school year's teaching assignments.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The implementation of this project would transpire during the 2017-2018 school year. To procure my project on the in-service calendar for the 2017-2018 school year, the acquiring of the approval from the school administration for performing the professional development would need to occur before the end of the current school year.

I will schedule a meeting with the administration to discuss the project, and following the endorsement, I will schedule the professional development opportunity in May 2017. In addition, to gaining the school administration's approval, I would also need to gain the approval from the district office administration and then have the project added to the list of meetings for the in-service week for the following school year. In accordance with the administration, I will contact the leadership team members and the teachers involved in PLCs via e-mail and advise them of the 3-day professional development opportunity and provide supplemental resources to peruse. I will then carry out the 3-day professional development in August 2017.

Role and Responsibilities of Students and Others

During the project, I will be the main person responsible for the implementation of the project, and I will undertake the role of facilitator for the 3-day professional development opportunity. The administration team will provide assistance in the way of procuring a setting that meets the needs for implementing the project. In addition, I will utilize the administration to acquire a list of the leadership team and the teachers by subject-based PLCs and their contact information. During the preparation phase of this project, I will contact a guest speaker or PLC specialist who is accustomed to implementing and presenting effective professional development opportunities on PLCs to assist me in training the leadership team. The leadership team will aid me during the third day of the training when the entire faculty comes together to discuss PLCs and school culture by instructing teachers on implementing effective PLCs with how teachers

should work in a PLC. The teachers involved in subject-based PLCs will go through the sessions participating in the project and provide feedback at the closure of the professional development opportunity.

Project Evaluation Plan

The purpose of this project is to supply a professional development opportunity that will inform teachers on what makes PLCs effective and efficient while utilizing PLCs as a tool that impacts a school's culture to increase student learning and successes. High school teachers and leadership team members can acquire skills and the knowledge to help the PLCs function successfully while promoting effective collaboration and communication. The professional development opportunity will be evaluated utilizing formative and summative methods. In terms of formative evaluation, the professional development opportunity will constantly be monitored and evaluated by the facilitator by asking follow-up and check-in questions throughout the training. Formative evaluation will allow the facilitator to monitor and adjust the sessions per the participants' needs, which should allow this project to be a more effective learning opportunity. As for the summative evaluation of the project, a survey will be utilized to assess the impact and success of the professional learning opportunity (see Appendix A). The surveys will be gathered on Day 1 for the leadership team participants and Day 3 for all the participants who completed the professional learning opportunity. By utilizing a survey to garner feedback for the professional development, I will be able to fine-tune the material and session methods for future implementation. Additionally, I will use a follow-up survey in

the spring of the same school year to gauge the participants' understandings on the influence the project had on their PLC usage and if any, on the culture of the school. Succeeding the collection of the follow-up data, I will report this information to the school under study and the district office administration during a scheduled meeting after the execution of the project and the collection of the follow-up surveys to present the impact and justification of the resources utilized.

The project will include a goal-based evaluation that will verify if the outcomes of the professional development opportunity indicate if the goals have been met. The goals of the project are to educate teachers and administrators about PLCs, provide necessary skills and knowledge to be an effective PLC, provide collaboration opportunities with colleagues while establishing a positive school culture, and provide support and accountability measures for effective usage of PLCs. The teachers and leadership team will be requested to fill out a survey to ascertain the effectiveness of the professional development opportunity. The surveys would allow the facilitator and administration to determine if the learning opportunity achieved its goals. I will utilize the evaluations to decide if there is a need to modify the project to meet the needs of teachers and leadership team members better. The survey results could also provide data necessary for securing monies from either the district office that contained the school under study, other school districts interested in this learning opportunity, or from grants to support the future utilization of this project.

Project Implications

Local Community

This project promotes positive social change at the local level by improving the knowledge and function of PLCs at the school under study to positively impact the school culture. With the professional learning opportunity, the leadership team and the teachers involved in PLCs will have a better understanding of how to function as an efficient and collaborative team. By having the faculty go through the professional development opportunity, the PLCs will become more concentrated on student and teacher learning instead of becoming gripe and complaint sessions. Positive social change can occur if the focus and function of the PLCs are kept on student learning and success, then a school's culture created by the PLCs can lead to a learning environment where all students learn and succeed. In addition to student learning and success, the improved school culture will give rise to an improvement in teacher retention, which reduces the turnover of PLC members and making the PLCs more efficient by reducing the re-training of new members.

Larger Context

This case study may serve as a guide to other schools and districts on how to improve PLCs that lead to a positive impact on school culture. Acquiring insight and feedback from teachers may provide an accurate measure for school leaders to improve the function of PLCs within a school or district. This project may also add to the existing knowledge field in Professional Learning Communities, as there is a gap of knowledge

when it comes to the impact PLCs have on a school's culture. The social change implication of this case study is focused on the value of teacher perceptions and how PLC knowledge and function may be improved. By improving the knowledge and skills of PLC leaders and members, schools can create a school culture that promotes a positive learning environment for all students through the efficient collaboration and communication of teachers and school leaders.

Conclusion

The proposed project was chosen due to the perceptions of high school teachers in regards to their PLC usage and its impact on school culture. A professional development opportunity was developed to be utilized as catalysts for change. This section, I described the rationale for selecting a professional development opportunity as the best approach for educating teachers. The literature review was carried out to gain a better understanding of how to devise, develop, and utilize this project. Furthermore, I conveyed the application of the project and the resources needed to decide if the professional development would meet the needs of the teachers and the leadership team to meet the goal of educating them on the knowledge and skills needed to function as an effective PLC.

The professional development opportunity was created due to the need present for teachers to understand how PLCs function in a manner that promotes sustainability of PLCs as well as how the PLCs impact a school's culture. In addition to the gains the teachers would acquire, the environment for the students would improve leading to

possible increases in student success. Utilizing the PLC meeting observations and the perceptions of teachers involved in PLCs, created a professional learning opportunity to contribute to the school under study.

The planned project for this study is a 3-day professional development opportunity that includes one day for the leadership team to review PLCs leadership and support. There will be one day for the teachers in PLCs to train on the effective skills needed to have an efficient PLC, and a one-day training involving the leadership team and teachers involved in PLCs to connect PLCs and school culture. The findings from the study suggested there is a need for a review of norms and practices, collaboration, communication, and leadership support in the existing PLCs at the school under study. Teachers to effectively utilize PLC resources need to have the skills and knowledge to utilize norms and practices to produce effect meetings, collaborate in a way that promotes effective communications, and the support from the administration to ensure accountability and the necessary resources are provided.

In Section 4, my reflections and conclusions are used to convey the project's strengths and limitations. In addition, the section presents the scholarship, project development, leadership, and change in regards to the project study. Section 4 also provides an opportunity for me to discuss what was learned about myself in terms of being a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. Finally, this section considers the implications and applications for this study as well as possible routes for future research.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In Section 4, I have included my reflections on the project study, the format utilized for addressing the research problem in the form of professional development, and the procedures for directing an effective 3-day professional development opportunity. I start with the strengths and limitations of this project study that delivers a 3-day professional development opportunity on PLCs and school culture. Then I address the recommendations for addressing alternative approaches or solutions to the research problems. Other areas discussed in this section include an analysis of myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer, an overall reflection of the significance of the project, and the possible influence the project could have on social change and proposed research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The main strength of this project was that through the interviews of high school teachers involved in PLCs and the observations of these PLCs at the school under study, it became evident that the PLCs needed to be revisited as a training opportunity. Essentially, the PLCs utilized per the data collected needed to re-focus the knowledge and skills of the PLC members to create an environment where collaboration and communication were more efficient to meet the needs of the students through PLCs. It has been found through research that PLCs can act as its professional development tool where individual teacher and group growth occurs alongside increased student successes (DuFour et al., 2008; DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Marzano et al., 2016). For this study, I

grounded through the learning theories of Bandura (1977), Vygotsky (1978), and Wenger (2000) to discuss how adults develop and learn. In addition, I utilized Hord's (1997) and DuFour et al.'s (2008) ideologies on PLCs to direct the work of this project study. From the literature reviewed in Section 1 and Section 3 of this study, research showed that current professional development practices are not always effective at enhancing professional growth (Groves & Ronnerman, 2012; Kennedy et al., 2011; Koellner & Jacobs, 2015; Watson, 2014). The use of a professional development opportunity can increase knowledge and skills where the ineffective use of time and collaboration are present in the usage of the current PLCs. The current PLCs cannot deliver the teachers with the appropriate collaboration, planning, and implementation to be effective due to the lack of guidance and accountability with their usage. This project can re-focus the essential facets of the modern PLCs to create a more conducive environment for professional growth and collaboration that can lead to increase student success.

Another strength of this project is its promise to increase the collaboration within the PLCs in a more efficient manner with the use of this project. It is essential to understand the practice of professional development to increase knowledge and skills needs to involve effective collaboration among its participants (Brodie, 2014; Collopy, 2015; Harris & Sass, 2011; Teague & Anfara, 2012). The teachers and leadership team members can collaborate with each other during the project and can create a better understanding of the importance of collaborating with colleagues. Additionally, the literature and the themes that arose from the data analysis, such as collaboration, norms

and practices, and communication, showed a need for more insight into how to work together more efficiently. Since PLCs are an effective model of professional development, it suggested to set up PLCs in a way that increases collaboration and communication among its members to affect student learning and the culture of a school (Barton & Stepanek, 2012; Marzano et al., 2016; Williams & Hierck, 2015).

In addition to increasing skills and knowledge with using PLCs and improving collaboration through this project, the potential is present to increase the support and accountability pieces to the usage of PLCs. Without having any guidance or support with using PLCs, PLCs will become ineffective and tend to become formal gripe sessions (DuFour & Fullan, 2013; Marzano et al., 2016; McComish & Parsons, 2013). However, with the use of this project that involves the leadership team, accountability and support can be re-focused and increased to aid in the sustainment and proper implementation of PLCs (Easton, 2016; Spencer, 2016). Since a lack of accountability and support from the leadership did affect the PLCs at the school under study from the data analysis, the use of this project can not only increase these facets of PLCs but to increase the collective potential of the leadership team as it pertains to sustaining the effective usage of PLCs to impact student learning and successes (Allen, 2013; DuFour & Mattos, 2013).

From the literature, there have been some limitations highlighted that could affect this project study. One limitation that could be present is the fact that the sample of the participants was quite small in this qualitative study project with only involving ten interviewees and five PLC meeting observations. I do not believe that this affected the

data collected for the study but an effort to interview more high school teachers who are involved in PLCs and make observations of PLC meetings could strengthen the study. Per Creswell (2012), a qualitative case study could have fewer participants than a quantitative study if the capability of the researcher to provide an in-depth picture of the case and if two participants are involved in a qualitative study, it increasing diminishes with added participants. To prevent a limited amount of participants, I utilized purposeful sampling to select the participants to allow for an adequate number of interviewees. Using purposeful sampling required me to have an ideal number of participants to select based on the need to answer the problem or research question (Creswell, 2012). Another limitation will be the allocating of resources for the 3-day professional development training sessions. Since the school and district budget is economically limited, a professional development opportunity may not seem feasible to the leadership without outside funds acquired. In addition, time might be a limitation due to the hard-scheduled professional development calendar in the district. It will be necessary to get the buy-in from not only the school leadership team but the district administration as well to provide an avenue to implement this project.

My recommendations for the alleviating the limitations of this project are to use the teacher workdays to implement the professional development opportunity sessions, which would allow all teachers to participate without putting a strain on the time of the teachers needed to prepare and the budget of the district. In all reality, a 3-day professional development cannot fix all the problems in a school. However, the

professional development opportunity is meant to change the leadership's expectations and guidance and the knowledge and skills of the teachers to continuingly increasing their practices with the PLCs to see personal and student growth while impacting the culture of the school.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Information collected from the PLC meeting observations and participant interviews directed me in creating a professional development opportunity for the teachers involved in PLCs and the leadership team at the school under study. The professional development opportunity can educate and train the leadership team on PLC knowledge and leadership skills as well as how to hold PLCs accountable. In addition, the professional development opportunity provides sessions for teachers to understand the necessary knowledge and skills better to operate as a functional PLC. The professional learning opportunity ends with a day where PLCs are connected to school culture and the impact PLCs have on the school's culture can be discussed. Nevertheless, the project could be handled by other means. One proposition for addressing the issue differently would be to generate an informational guidebook containing supporting literature for PLCs and school culture as well as the information from the professional development opportunity. This informational guidebook could be made available when needed and be housed in a school's professional resources section in the library for easy access. However, this recommendation would not have the expected results unless there was an

effort for the teachers to utilize the resource and collaborate on learning with their colleagues.

An alternative recommendation for addressing the project would be to develop a PLC leadership council. The council would have a member from each of the school's PLCs and would meet monthly. The council could discuss issues occurring in the school and PLCs, the status of the school's culture and PLCs, and any possible solutions to systemic issues affecting the learning environment for students and the culture of the school. The representative for each PLC would then have the responsibility to report out to their PLC on these meetings as well as bring forth concerns and issues from that PLC to the leadership council. By having a PLC leadership council, the administration and faculty can be more connected to what is going on outside of each professional's classroom or office and can create a more positive school culture that directly impacts what is happening in the classroom resulting in student successes. However, the problem with such a suggestion may not have the wide-ranging results unless there is buy-in from not only the administration to implement such a council but to have the support from the teachers since they would drive the process. If the PLCs do not function effectively in terms of collaboration and communication, then the PLC leadership council would not produce any of the anticipated results.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Scholarship

During the progression of this project study, I realize I have learned several things about higher education and scholarship as it pertains to the doctoral process. Because of this study, I feel I have collected a better knowledge of not only the study topic but the overall research process. The process of completing the project study was a difficult process in terms of the doctoral writing process. I do pride myself on working diligently through this process despite the life distractions, but the pressure of completing this doctoral study while fully employed as high school teacher and coach did prove to be challenging at times. Issues such as time management, organization, and life responsibilities focused me on keeping a strict schedule. Many times, after a full day of teaching and being a father, I did find myself worn down particularly during the writing phase of the project. On many occasions, I had to utilize my resilience and dedication to keep up the work after a long day to keep researching and writing into the late hours into the night.

I felt collecting, analyzing, and organizing my research was not a challenge to me due to my profession as a high school science teacher. I am proficient in creating a coherent connection between the research and the study of the use of peer-reviewed and recent scholarly work. In terms of the writing process, I was a little frustrated with the iterative writing process, but with feedback from my doctoral committee, I gained a better understanding and comfort with its use. During this doctoral process, I raised

myself to the challenge, and I am quite pleased with maintaining a 4.0 GPA throughout the program.

Now that the project is complete, I now can reflect on my effort and experiences during this journey. I utilized my knowledge and research skills from previous educational classes to reflect on this study. My experience with coursework trained me to reflect critically and to utilize scholarly writing. The experience I gained from the feedback received from my professors and peers taught me to acknowledge and examine different perspectives.

This program not only improved my abilities as a science teacher in a PLC, but it also has provided an opportunity to challenge myself to become a scholar-practitioner and a better teacher-leader. I hope the project I have completed can provide a benefit to schools that utilize Professional Learning Communities as an organizational model. In addition, I hope to continue down the path of being an educational leader that one day will make a difference in the educational field by making learning for all students a possibility.

Project Development

As I devised and developed the professional development opportunity, I recognized that the project required a surprising amount of time and hard work as well as the fortitude to stay focused. For the study, I made sure to address the teachers' requirements and could develop the professional development per what was the apparent needs of the school's PLCs. Analyzing the needs of the school and the teachers while

planning the project allows for providing the best learning experience that translates to better PLC usage. By planning this professional learning opportunity, I described the methods and frameworks for examining the sessions and if I met the needs of the teachers and school.

During the development process, I saw the need to reflect on the question of how well I devised the sessions for the professional development. For a professional development to be considered effective and successful, it must produce results that are supported by evidence. As the developer and facilitator of this project, it is my responsibility to ensure that the time and resources that are utilized for this professional development opportunity are used to construct the maximum impact. To gauge the impact of this learning opportunity, I will inspect the attitudes of the participants about the various sessions, evaluate the knowledge gained by the participants, and evaluate any behavioral or practical changes in the usage of PLCs.

Leadership and Change

Leadership is an important and necessary attribute for an educator. As a high school science teacher, coach, and doctoral student, I have started to witness that fellow educators value my actions, beliefs, and experience. I believe that I can influence many different people in the various aspects of my life and my passion and actions should help others improve their life. From this doctoral process and my experiences as a classroom teacher, I feel that my purpose of being a leader within a classroom, team, or even school can impact my viewpoint of what needs to transform to make a difference in education.

In this project, I have seized the opportunity to identify the needed changes and revealed appropriate ways to approach change. I have learned through this program that as a leader I must be aware and reactive to change. Change is not easy since it takes time, resources, energy, in addition to effective leadership. To carry out this process, I started with an idea and shared my idea by developing a professional development opportunity for high school teachers to make a difference in the way we address student needs. This project required me to have the prudence to know where I needed to go and a willingness to share this vision to make reaching my goal a possibility. From this project, I have made a positive change with my contribution to others in my profession and the possibility of making a difference in many classrooms that leads to more student successes. As a teacher in today's educational environment, I am honored to teach today's young minds and hope that I can leave a lasting mark on this profession with the help of obtaining this prestigious terminal degree.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

I have been in school since the age of five, and I have had my challenges as a student, but through this process and perseverance, I have become quite comfortable with dealing with scholarly work. During the doctoral journey with the required coursework, I utilized experiences from preparatory school, undergraduate, graduate, and as of late, my doctoral undertaking. I recognized early that time management, motivation, organization, and working with scholarly works are some of my strengths and I applied these skills to my project. I utilized my past and current experiences as an educator and scholar-

practitioner to complete this doctoral process. Through this process, I had to work on improving my time management and organization skills due to the amount of research and course work needed to complete this journey. From this point, I am happy with my efforts and works, especially this doctoral project, since I know I have put my best effort into this process to allow myself to improve personally and professionally.

In terms of taking on the role of scholar-practitioner to complete this project, I made sure to focus on my action research skills. Being a teacher for over ten years has allowed me to gain quite a bit of experience both as an educator and an educational leader, but I found that I can make an impact in education outside of the classroom through the process of conducting research. During this process, I thought of it to be quite interesting to have the dual role of not only being the educator but the learner at the same time. From my experiences, I have gained the perspective of being a researcher and teacher, which aided the interviews and observations by having some rapport with the teacher participants and the information I was seeking. At the end of this doctoral journey, I would describe myself as a scholar-practitioner, since I have improved my skills as a researcher and have created a project that can make a difference in a school and the education profession.

I believe this project study is providing a starting point for future research in high schools that utilize Professional Learning Communities to build a school culture that allows all students to learn and succeed. Being a project developer, I utilized my previous experiences to identify the problem, search out relevant research, create a

potential study project, and then implement it, while following not only professional standards designated by professionals and Walden University. This process was familiar since I had to complete project study for my Master's degree and thus, I was familiar with many of the research requirements. By creating and implementing this project study, I have allowed for future research to build on this research to make a difference in PLC usage and sustainment to improve the learning for all students.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

When I started on this doctoral path, I was uncertain of what path I would take to complete the project study. As I completed each course and its assignments, the path for this doctoral study became more apparent. As I discussed and listened to the teachers in the school under study, it became clear that the contribution that needed to be made from this project study was a professional development opportunity to train the leadership and teachers to ensure the effective use and sustainability of the school's PLCs. It was with the collaboration and communication between the ten high school teachers and the observations of PLC meetings that it would be most effective to carry out a learning opportunity in the form of professional development. I have faith the project study accurately captured the perceptions of PLC member and leaders in a way that informs local educational professionals and possibly, in the larger context. Because of analyzing and presenting the perceptions of the participants to not only the leadership teams but teachers involved in PLCs may improve the functionality of PLCs within a school that creates not only improvements to a school's culture but the collaborative skills to

increase student success. No matter if this project affects an isolated case, such as the school under study, or as a model for future research, I have confidence in the fact that this project contributed to positive change in PLC usage and understanding its impact on school culture.

The project study has positive social change implications by utilizing the research to guide a professional development that promotes a more positive school culture. The professional development has the potential to reaching all leadership team members as well as the teachers within a school. By improving norms and practices, collaboration, communication, and leadership support in terms of PLCs usage within a school, a school can improve the school culture in a way that promotes improved student learning and successes with the use of effective and efficiently utilized PLCs. The project can be used as a vehicle by researchers to acquire information desired from teachers who are involved in the professional development training. Furthermore, the project can aid teachers in devising and putting into action effective and sustainable PLCs to promote an improved school culture in the school under study, schools around the district, and schools throughout the world.

The study concentrated primarily on the perceptions of high school teachers involved in PLCs and the impact PLCs have on school culture. In regards to future research, this study may serve to inform local leaders and educators on the current state of Professional Learning Communities in a school and how it impacts the school culture in manner that enhances the learning environment for all students. This study may serve

as a building block for future research by focusing on teacher perceptions and making observations of PLCs in action to determine the effectiveness of the PLCs within a varying learning environments to determine any impacts the PLCs have on school culture.

Conclusion

During the coursework at Walden University and the forming of this project, I was provided an opportunity to explore an existing problem within the field of education with implications the local community and greater context. After a considerable amount of literature review and collected data analysis, I concluded that this project may serve as a social change agent. Whether this study changes the implementation or sustainment of Professional Learning Communities in a way that impacts school culture, I know my efforts can positively affect my school or district.

The case study serves to add available research to Professional Learning Communities, professional development, and school culture. Future research should continue to concentrate on these topics, as there still exists a gap pertaining to teacher perceptions of the impact PLCs have on school culture. I have learned to reflect on my actions critically and attitude in my both my academic and professional endeavors, in hopes of improving the schools I teach in and the educational field to provide opportunities for students to succeed in a way that produces productive members of society through their successes as a student. It is my goal that my doctoral journey has impacted the learning environments around me in a way that teachers can utilize

professional learning communities in an effective and efficient manner to positively impact the learning for students. Finally, from this study, I can infer that XYZ High School has the groundwork to plan and implement PLCs effectively, but until norms and practices, collaboration, communication, leadership support, and accountability are addressed, effectively utilized PLCs at XYZ High School will not happen.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development 3-Day Training

Goals, Outcomes, and Objectives

Program Goals

1. Educate high school teachers and administrators on Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).
2. Provide high school teachers and administrators with the necessary knowledge and skills to understand the function and practices of PLCs.
3. Provide an opportunity for teachers and administrators to collaborate with their colleagues establishing an effective and positive school culture using PLCs.
4. Provide support and accountability measures for the implementation of effective PLCs.

Program Outcomes

1. High School teachers and administrators will understand the benefits of PLCs that are effectively implemented.
2. PLC members and administrators will learn to collaborate with colleagues to establish relationships for building a positive school culture and student success.
3. PLC members will utilize time learning with their colleagues and foster PLC norms/practices and instructional strategies to ensure the goal of all students learning.
4. High School teachers will learn how to operate and maintain effective PLCs.

Program Objectives

1. As a result of the PLC training, PLC members and administrators will be able to distinguish the benefits of PLCs and what makes an effective PLC work.
2. As a result of the PLC training, PLC members will be able to develop and carry out effective PLCs usage.
3. As a result of the PLC training, PLC members and administrators will be able to utilize PLCs effectively to sustain and/or improve the school culture.
4. As a result of the PLC training, PLC member and administrators will understand their role and responsibilities when working with a PLC.

Resources that could be utilized to support the development of a PLC

- http://www.allthingsplc.info
- https://learningforward.org/docs/tools-for-learning-schools/tools8-99.pdf?sfvrsn=2
- https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/learning-system/ls-sum13-creating-norms-tool.pdf
- http://www.sedl.org/insights/2-3/implementing_effective_professional_learning_communities.pdf
- http://www.is-toolkit.com/knowledge_library/kl_files/ProfessionalLearningCommunity_A%20Brief%20Guide.pdf
- http://www.allthingsplc.info/blog/view/155/10+Steps+to+Creating+a+PLC+Culture

- https://wvde.state.wv.us/ctn/Workshop%20Materials/CTN%20October%20Conference/October%20Day1%20Handouts.pdf
- https://www.k12blueprint.com/toolkits/plc
- http://isd194.org/download/communications_master/upper_nav./staff/teaching_and_learning/PLC_Handbook.pdf

Target Audience

- High School Teachers
- High School Administrators
- PLC leaders
- Teacher Leaders
- Department Chairs

Format

A variation of methods that include:

- Brainstorming
- Demonstration activities
- PowerPoint Presentations
- Role-Playing Activity
- Breakout Sessions
- Question and Answer Sessions
- Working Session in PLC groups

Timetable

The 3-Day Professional Development Session should take place August 2017. The planning for this professional development activity should begin by the end of the 2016-2017 school year to establish more tangible information for the administrator and school leaders for the training sessions.

Materials

- Articles about PLCs and sample videos of functioning PLCs
- Sticky Notes
- Pencils, Index Cards, and Paper
- Laptops
- Chart Paper, markers, and tape
- Handouts
- PowerPoint Presentation
- Electronic presentation equipment
- Evaluation Forms

Professional Development 3-Day Training Agenda

Day 1 Agenda (School administration including department chairs and PLC leads)

8:30-9:00→ Continental Breakfast

9:00-9:30→ Facilitator will guide the group through the following activities:

- Welcome (Slide 1)
- Introductions- facilitator states: "Please introduce yourself with the following: your name, subjects taught, years as a teacher and/or administrator if you have been in a PLC before or are you a PLC rookie, and expectation you have for this training".
- Icebreaker activity-Common Chain (Slide 2)
    - The activity will build a group bond and provide an overview of the training objectives.
- The facilitator will establish the expectations for the professional development training (Slide 3).
- The facilitator will state the purpose of the training: "The purpose of the training session is to strengthen the school's PLCs and teachers as well as how PLCs affect a school's culture.
- The learning objectives will be discussed by the facilitator for the training.
- The facilitator will introduce the day's guest speaker for the training session.
    - The guest speaker will be a professional learning communities' consultant with experience organizing and directing training for educators. The facilitator requested that certain topics and activities be addressed during the guest speaker's presentation.

9:30-10:30→The guest speaker will address the expectations for the session.

    - What makes a group function such as a successful team?
    - What irks you during these sorts of meetings or training?
    - What is okay and not okay in these sorts of sessions?
- Guest speaker will address how to promote successful and effective PLCs and lead an activity for the leadership group.
    - Breakout Session: Leadership group will collaborate to identify the needs for improvement in the school/PLCs and create a plan to address those needs.

10:30-10:45→ Break

10:45-11:45→ Guest speaker presentation will address the following:

  - What is a PLC?
  - What makes an effective PLC tick?
  - Implementation of the PLCs at the training site.
  - Characteristics of Successful PLCs and PLC schools.
- Facilitator will provide directions for the breakout session
  - Breakout Session: School leadership group will work in groups to respond to the following prompts:
    - What is the role of the various leadership positions in the school (principal, assistant principals, department heads, and PLC leads) and the educators' role in a PLC?
    - What makes a PLC effective?
    - What could make a PLC ineffective?
    - What could you do to sustain the PLCs at this school?

11:45-12:45→ Lunch

12:45-1:45→ An administrator will review school data with the leadership team by asking the following:

- What does our data state about the status of our professional learning community? (State report data and yearly teacher survey results as well as anecdotal data from the last year)
- Review of the expectations for the training opportunity.

- The administrator will lead participants in activities to emphasize their awareness of student performance in the classroom and the school (using local school data).
  - Leadership team members will be divided into groups to observe the school data, analyze samples of student work, discuss effective strategies to support learning, create and evaluate lessons, and brainstorm classroom assessments to gauge student progress.
  - Groups will have a fixed amount of time to collaborate then will participate in a discuss and share session

1:45-2:00→ Break

2:00-3:00→ Facilitator will lead the leadership team in an activity.

  - Directions on the board will instruct participants to list "Effective Leadership Attributes" and "Ineffective Leadership Attributes."
  - Participants will write their responses on sticky notes and place them under the appropriate column on the wall.
  - Participants will discuss responses and share what was learned in the activity.

    - Enrichment opportunity- have participants describe school leaders that has made an impact positive or negative and what attributes did they possess?
- The facilitator will review what makes an adult learner (Slide 4) and provide directions for the group activity on adult learners.
    - Breakout Session- the Leadership team, will be put into teams to practice the concepts of adult learning that have been discussed. The teams will role play scenarios where adult learning theory applies, especially within PLCs. This will allow the participants to utilize role-playing work on communication and time management as it applies to leadership.
- The Leadership team will work on collaboratively in a round robin activity to discover what accountability measures can be utilized within the school to ensure the effectiveness of the Professional Learning Communities.
    - The facilitator will lead this activity to aid the leadership team to create layers of accountability that they would like to be utilized during the school year to ensure full participation of each PLC member.
- Closing Activity→ Gorilla Story (Slide 5&6)
- The facilitator will explain the purpose of the feedback form, hand out the form, and allow enough time for the teachers to complete the form (Day 1 Evaluation Form-Leadership Team).

<u>Day 2 Agenda (Teachers/Rest of staff not involved in Day1 and Day 1 Participants return Day 3)</u>

8:30-9:00→ Breakfast

9:00-9:30→ The facilitator will guide the training group through the following activities:

- Welcome (Slide 7)
- Introductions- facilitator states: "Please introduce yourself with the following: your name, subjects taught, years as a teacher and/or administrator if you have been in a PLC before or are you a PLC rookie, and expectation you have for this training".
- I am Unique Activity (Slide 8)
- Icebreaker Activity (Slide 9)—KWL
- The facilitator will work to create a group rapport and communicate the objectives for the training.
- Participants will be divided into small groups based upon their PLCs. Each group will be afforded an opportunity to create norms for the group. Each group will devise, refine, and come to an agreement on the norms for the group for not only the session but for future meetings throughout the year.

- The facilitator will establish the norms for the whole group (Slide 10).

9:30-10:30→ The facilitator will guide the participants in an activity.

- A discussion on the purpose of the training will ensure and state "The purpose of this professional development sessions is to increase our knowledge and skills with the use of Professional Learning Communities in a way that strengthens your school culture."
- With maintaining the same groups or teams, each group will define Professional Learning Communities and record their definitions on chart paper and display it on the wall. Each group will communicate their definition to the entire whole training group.
- Each group will then discuss the following and take turns sharing between amongst the groups.
    - What is your perception of your PLC?
    - Does your team model the created definition?
    - What could your PLC this year improve upon?
    - What steps would you take for your team to function as a best possible PLC?
    - Among the groups, each group leader will inquire: "How could regular discussions like this session help our PLCs function efficiently and effectively?"
- The facilitator will guide the participants in an activity.
    - Discuss the model of Professional Learning Communities and the best practices associated with it (Slide 11-12).
    - Following the presentation of the material, the groups will discuss the model of PLCs and share what they feel are the best practices the members attempt to utilize. In addition, the group will ascertain collaboratively if the practices they utilize are best or not and what can be done to adjust them.
    - Each group will be given a different article pertaining to the usage of PLCs in schools and will debrief each other on the article. On a poster board, the groups will list what makes PLCs successful and what would be considered pitfalls or shortcomings to implementing PLCs.
    - The participants will share what each group feels are the accomplishments and shortcomings of implementing and sustaining PLCs.

10:30-10:45→ Break

10:45-12:00→ Facilitator will lead the group in a discussion and activity on collective responsibility in PLCs.

- The facilitator will lead a presentation and question and answer session on collective responsibility in PLCs (Slides 13).
- The facilitator will lead the groups in an activity focusing on creating a consensus for a culture of collective responsibility (Slide 14).
    - Each group will:
        - Have each member honestly reflect and record your honest and unfiltered answer to each question.
        - Share each participant's answers with the member's group.
        - Discuss the responses collectively and look to develop possible actions.
        - As whole training group, each group will share their most relevant responses to each question with the whole training group.

12-:00-1:00→ Lunch

1:00-2:00→ The facilitator will lead an activity on collaboration.

- The directions on the board or projection screen will guide participants to list examples "Effective (positive) Collaboration" and "Ineffective (negative) Collaboration".
- Participants will record their responses on sticky notes and affix them to the corresponding column.
- The participants will reflect on the responses and collectively discuss what was inquired from the activity.
- Each group leader will ask their assigned group: "Why is collaboration essential for the sustainment of PLCs?"
    - Each group will brainstorm situations that obstruct collaboration within PLCs and pick one to role play for the whole training group.
    - From the role-playing scenarios, the group will work to create solutions to possible collaboration obstructions.

2:00-3:00→ Each group leader will discuss with their group:

    - How to implement and sustain PLCs in general and at their school?
- The facilitator will direct participants in an activity on effective PLCs.
    - The participants will be divided into different groups for this session with random group generation. Each group will be asked to deliberate on what makes an effective PLC and create a list of the most important responses. One person from the group will record the what the group came up with. Each group will then do a poster walk around to see what each group created. Following the walkthrough, the whole group will point out commonalities and differences between the groups' responses.

- To close the session, each participant will go through 3-2-1 Summarizing Strategy in their group
    - Share 3 new things learned.
    - Discuss 2 things they found interesting from the session.
    - Communicate 1 question they still have from the session.

Day 3 Agenda- (Whole staff including teachers and school leadership)

8:30-9:00→ Continental Breakfast

9:00-9:30→ The facilitator will guide the entire group in the following activities:

- Welcome Back (Slide 15).
- Revisit the norms for the professional development opportunity (Slide 16).
- Whole Group Discussion and Questions to recap Day 2
- My Slogan Activity (Slide 17).

9:30-10:30→ The facilitator will guide the group in the following activities regarding school culture:

- The facilitator will present information on School Culture and PLCs (Slides 18-19).
- In each small group, the group will come up with 10 words or less to describe the culture of the school. Following the creation of the 10-word description, each group member will "Popcorn" with the 3 other participants from separate groups and share what each has come up with. To conclude the activity, the participants will return to their home groups and share what they have learned from each group.
- The facilitator will guide the group in a School Culture Timeline (Slide 20).
    - Each group will create a timeline of the school and mark on the timeline when cultural shifts have been observed at the school.
    - Once the timeline has been filled out, the group will brainstorm what caused each cultural shift at the school and conclude with what could have been done differently to enhance or prevent the cultural shirt.

10:30-10:45→ Break

10:45-12:00→ The facilitator will the group in an activity.

- Envisioning Activity (Slides 21)
    - Each group will answer and share responses on the school's vision based on inspiration and aspiration.
    - Each participant will then complete the critical issues chart (Handout 1) and share each participant's responses. As a group, a consensus will be created through collaboration and the completion of the activity

conclusion answers. Each group will present their answers through a group spokesperson.

- The facilitator will lead a group discussion on the importance of having a vision as a school to guide the PLCs.

12:00-1:00→ Lunch

1:00-2:00→ The facilitator will instruct the participants to form groups with members of varying subjects to perform skits on PLCs

  - Each group leader will select an index card from a bucket. Each index card will have different facets of PLCs written on it. Each group will create and practice a short skit that highlights the selected facet. Each skit will be performed in front of their peers.
  - Groups will perform their skit on PLCs and school culture. Each group will assign a spokesperson to explain to the whole group what the skit is about and answer any questions.
  - After each scenario, a discussion about the participants' observations of PLC facet they viewed and how it reflects their school.

2:00-3:00→ The facilitator will guide the participants in an activity.

- The facilitator will lead the group in a question and answer session on what was seen not only the previous skits as well as the training session.
- Participants will come back to their K-W-L chart from Day 2 to add to their "L" column. Each participant/group will add to the group discussion on what was learned from the sessions.
- The facilitator will explain the purpose of the feedback form, hand out the forms, and allow sufficient time for the participants to complete the form (3-Day Professional Development Training-Participant Evaluation).

Handout 1

Critical Issues Chart

Directions- Look at critical issue and perform the following:

1. Determine the level of implementation of each issue by selecting the appropriate designation:
    a. Fully Implemented and in place (IP)
    b. Not fully implemented and working on it (WO)
    c. Not yet implemented and not yet being addressed (NY)

**Note any item determined as being in place must be supported by evidence.

2. Determine whether each issue is curriculum (C), an assessment issue (A), or a team issue (T). Some issues may be more than one designation.
3. Indicate the implementation level and type of issue in the space for each item (for example, IP/C).

___1. We have organized staff members into meaningful collaborative teams that support each member's daily responsibilities.

___2. Protected time is provided for collaborative teams to meet on a weekly basis.

___3. We have identified team norms and protocols to guide in working together.

___4. We have created the bar by analyzing student data and getting clear on essential learning of our course in general as well as essential learnings of each unit in alignment with state and district standards as well as high-stakes exams.

___5. We have established a short-term SMART goal of ensuring that 100 percent of students master the identified essential learning targets by working interdependently.

___6. We demonstrate a sense of urgency by tracking and monitoring the progress of our goals on a weekly basis.

___7. We have prioritized course content or topics so we can devote more time to the essential curriculum.

___8. We have agreed on how to best sequence the content of the course and have established pacing guides to help students achieve the intended essential learnings.

___9. We have agreed on the criteria we will use in judging the quality of student work related to the essential learnings of the course in a consistent manner.

___10. We have identified the prerequisite knowledge, and skills students need to master the essential learnings of our courses and each of their units.

___11. We have identified strategies and created instruments to assess whether students have the prerequisite knowledge and skills.

___12. We have taught students the criteria we will use in judging the quality of their work and have provided them with examples

___13. We have developed frequent common formative assessments that help us to determine each student's mastery of essential learnings.

___14. We have established the proficiency standard we want each student to achieve on each skill and concept examined with our common formative assessments.

___15. We use the results of our common formative assessments to assist each other in building on strengths and addressing weaknesses as part of a process of continuous improvement designed to help students at higher levels.

___16. We use common formative assessments to identify students who need additional time and support to master essential learnings, and we work within the systems and processes of the school to ensure they receive that support.

___17. We have developed common summative assessments that help us assess the strengths and weaknesses of our program.

___18. We have established the proficiency standard we want each student to achieve on each skill and concept examined with our common summative assessments.

Critical Issues Summary Table

	C	A	T
IP			
WO			
NY			

Activity and Handout adapted from Williams & Hierck (2015) Starting a movement: Building culture from the inside out in professional learning communities.

3-Day Professional Development Training

Day 1 Evaluation Form-Leadership Team

Thank you for participating in the professional development session on PLCs and leadership. Please take a few minutes to complete this evaluation. The feedback provided will present valuable information to the presenter and help make informed decisions for future professional development opportunities at your school.

Use the following rating scale when making your responses:

1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

Please circle one for each statement

This professional development's objectives were clearly stated.	1 2 3 4 5
This professional development's objectives were met.	1 2 3 4 5
This professional development helped me better understand PLCs as a whole.	1 2 3 4 5
The professional development helped taught me how accountability and leadership have a role in effective PLCs.	1 2 3 4 5
The professional development taught me how to utilize PLCs to drive instruction and decision-making.	1 2 3 4 5
Overall, this professional development was a successful experience for me.	1 2 3 4 5

List any suggestions for improving this professional development or any activity within the sessions.

What support will you need to be a successful leader when it comes to PLCs at your school?

Please make any suggestions on how to provide the needed support.

3-Day Professional Development Training-Participant Evaluation

Thank you for participating in the 3-Day Professional Development Training. Please take a few moments to complete the evaluation below. The feedback you provide will be used to make informed decisions on future Professional Learning Communities professional development.

Use the following rating scale when marking your responses:

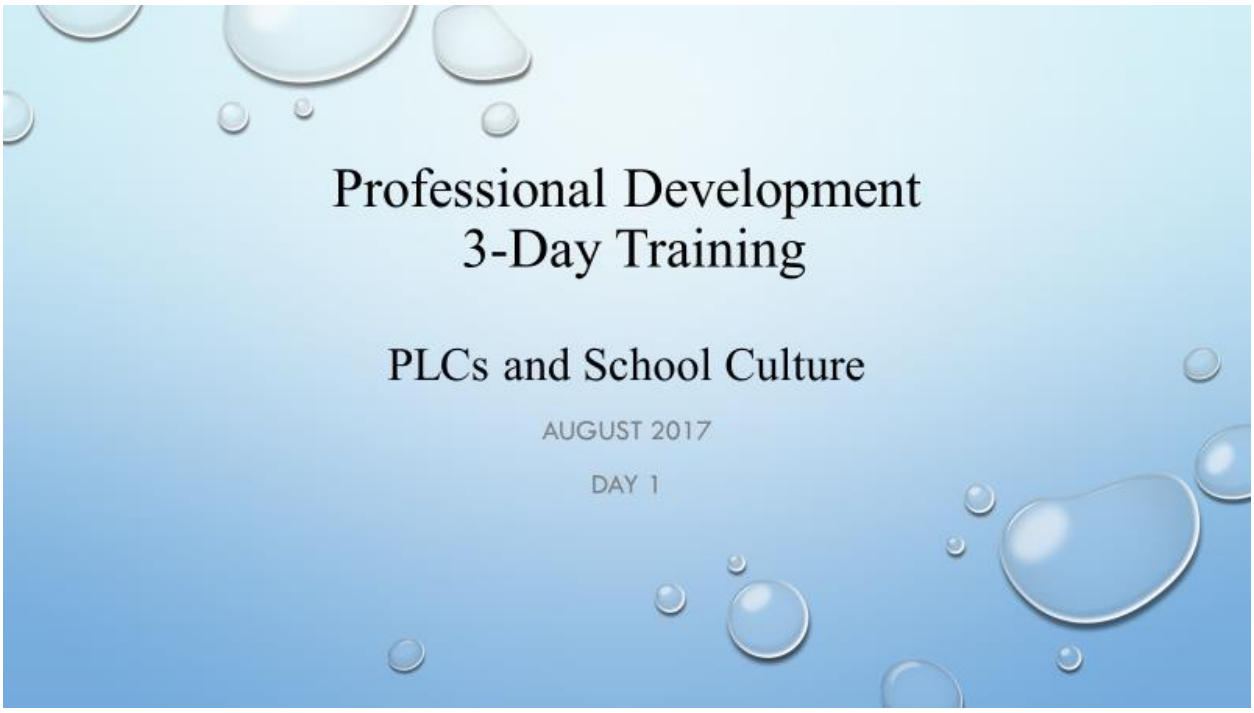
1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree

This professional development's objectives were clearly stated.	1	2	3	4	5
The professional development's objectives were met.	1	2	3	4	5
This professional development helped me understand PLCs better.	1	2	3	4	5
The professional development helped me understand my role in a PLC.	1	2	3	4	5
The professional development helped me connect the use of PLCs to school culture.	1	2	3	4	5
The professional development included presentations and activities that were well-organized and informational.	1	2	3	4	5
The professional development was current and relevant for my professional growth.	1	2	3	4	5
Overall, the professional development was a positive experience for me.	1	2	3	4	5

Please list any suggestions you have for improving this professional development training.

After going through this professional development, has your perception of PLCs and school culture changed? If so, how?

Slide 1



Slide 2

Common Chain Ice Breaker Activity

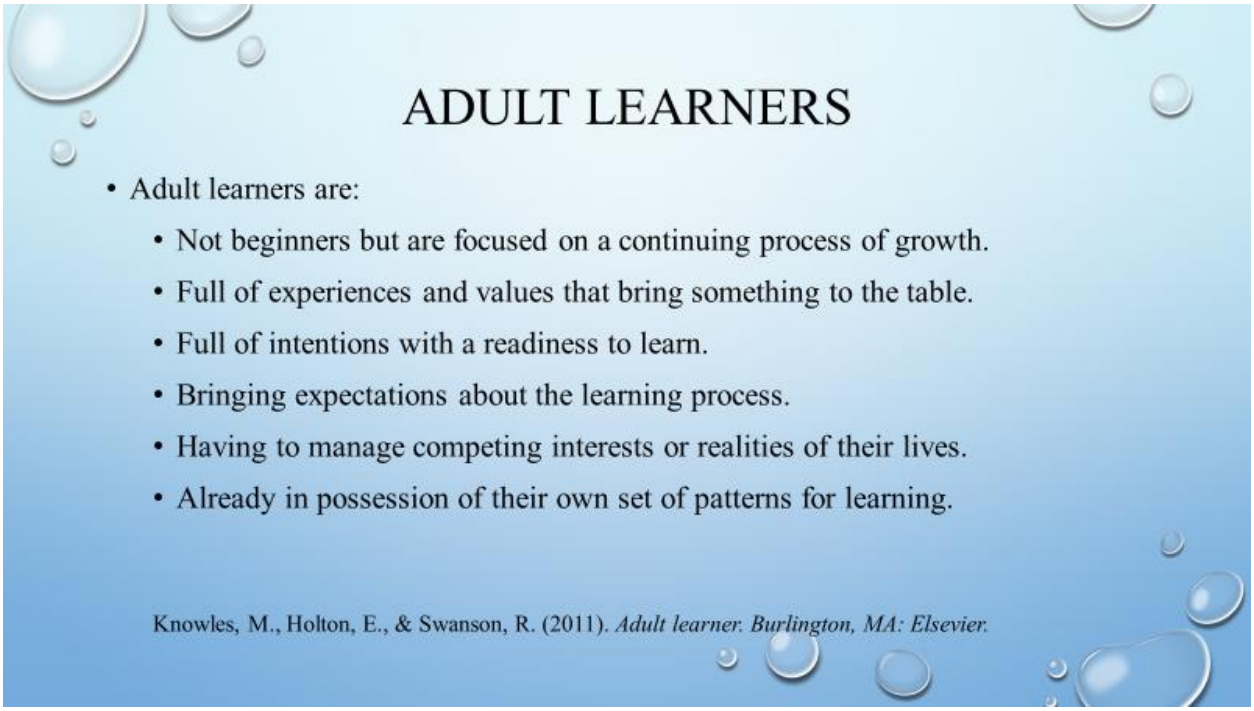
- I will tell you some interesting facts about myself. When you hear something that we have in common, you will need to link arms with the me (facilitator). Then the next person who became part of the chain will describe themselves and when you hear something you have in common, please come up and the first person up will bond with the chain. We will do this until we create a whole chain.
- As a circle chain of participants and facilitator, i will discuss the overview and objectives of the day's session.
- Http://www.Ehow.Com/info_8254687_ice-activities-teacher-professional-development.Html

Slide 3

Professional Development Norms

- Be positive.
- Participate with a purpose.
- Be respectful of all participants
- Use appropriate electronics etiquette
- Listen to the knowledge being presented with an open mind.

Slide 4



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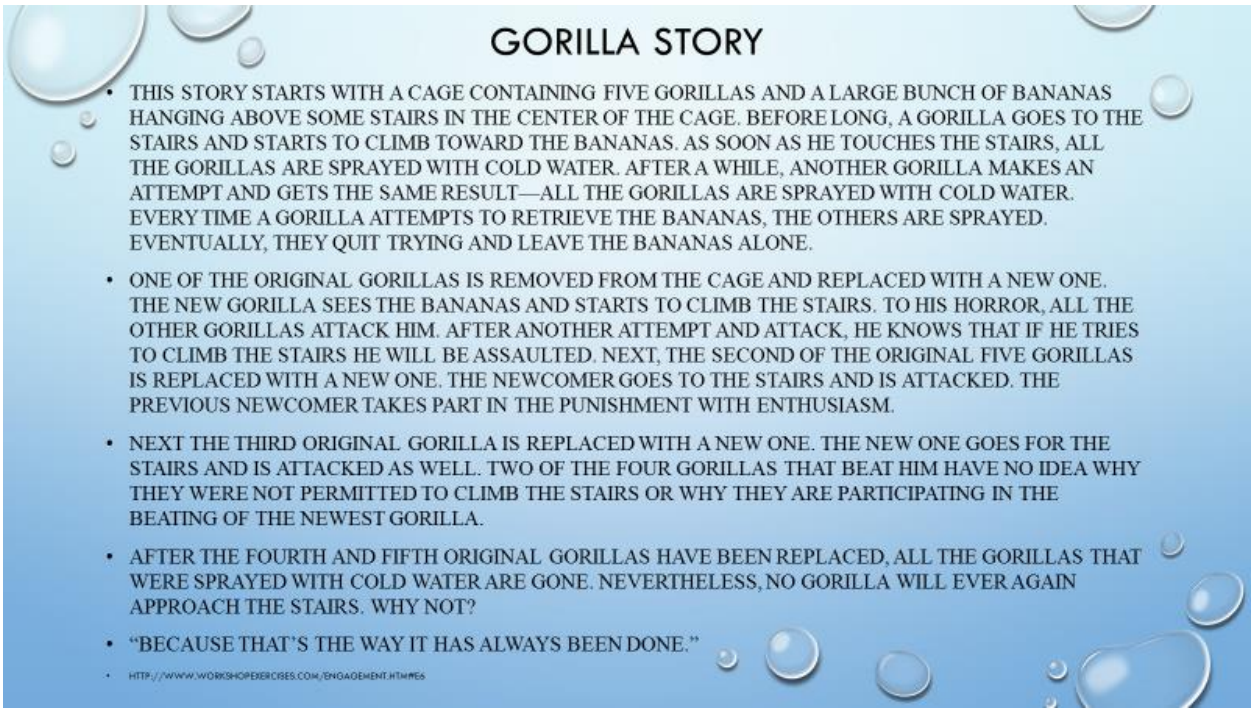

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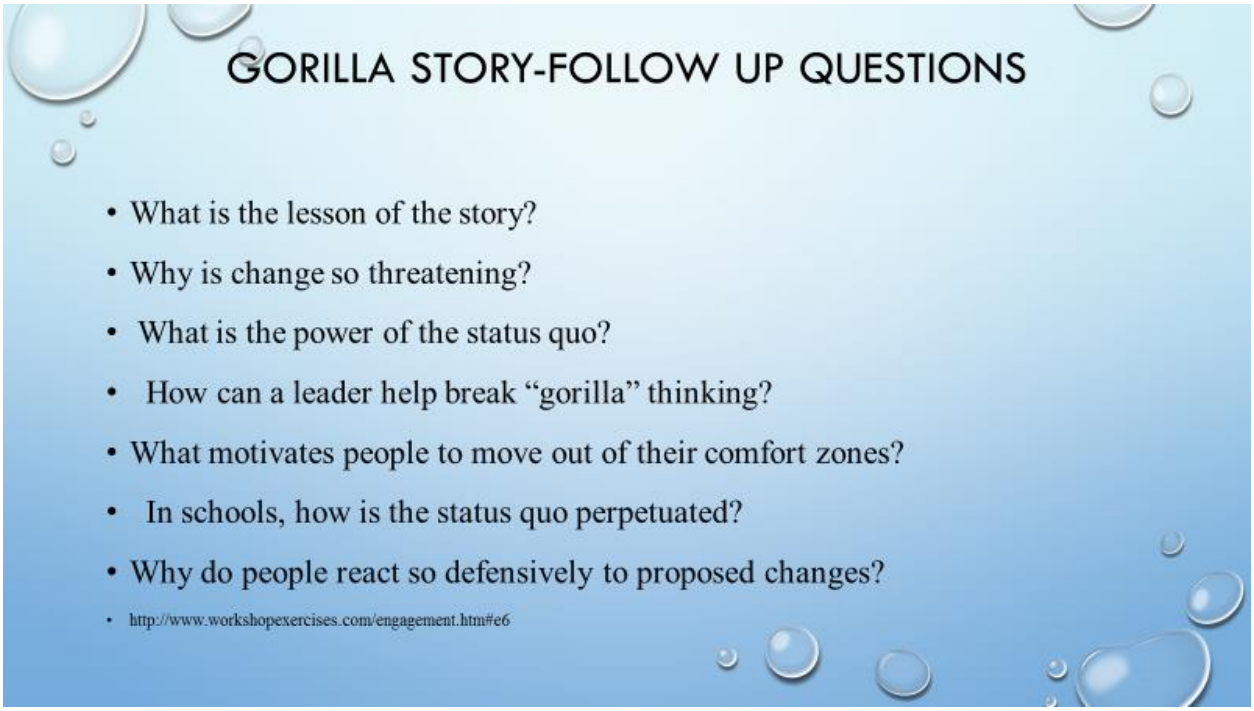

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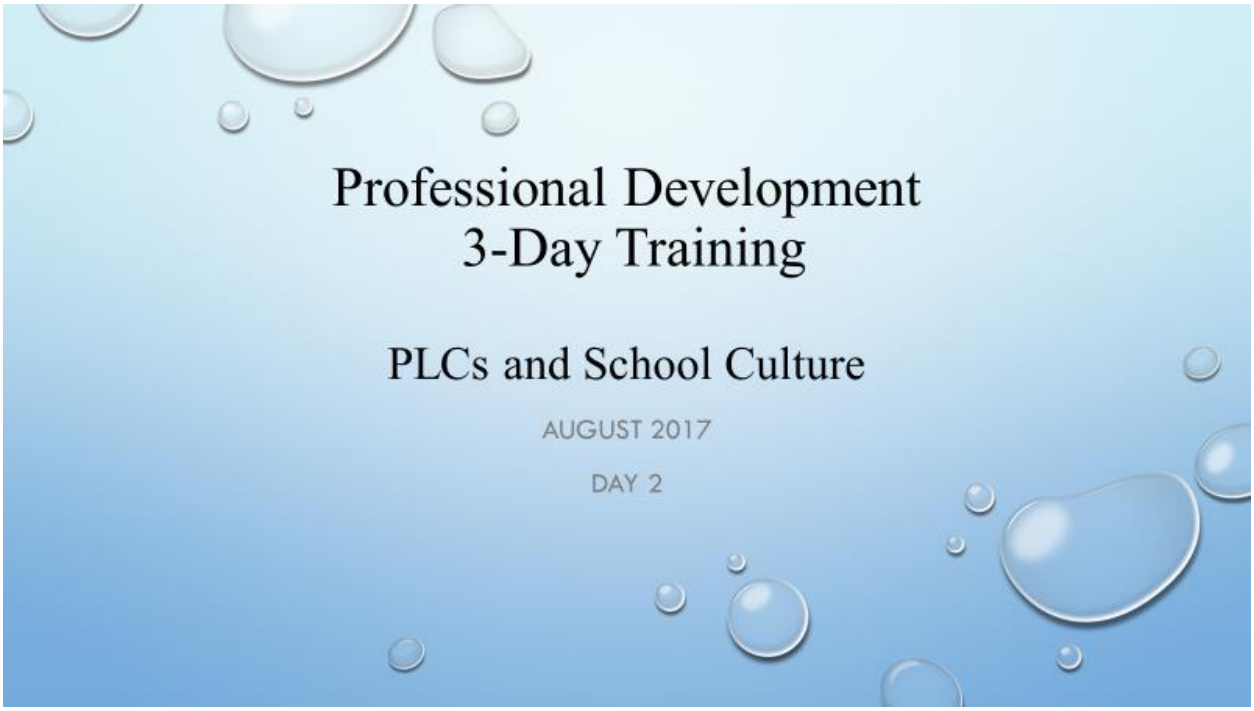
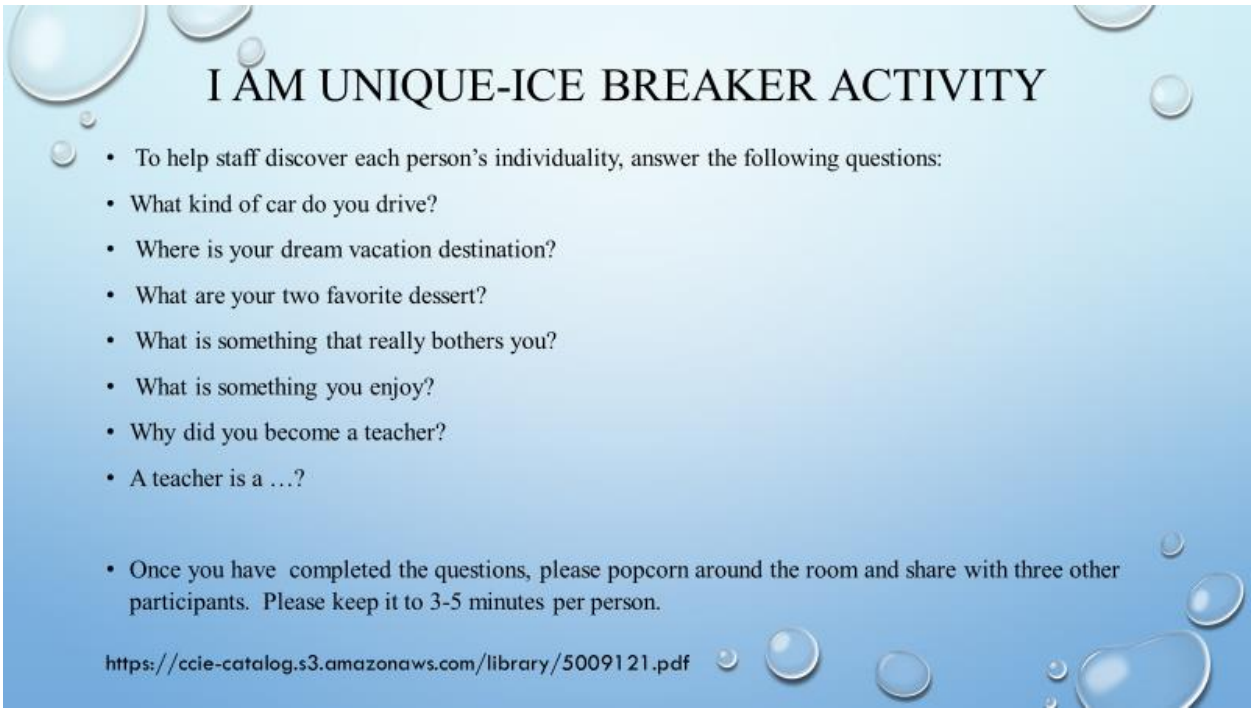
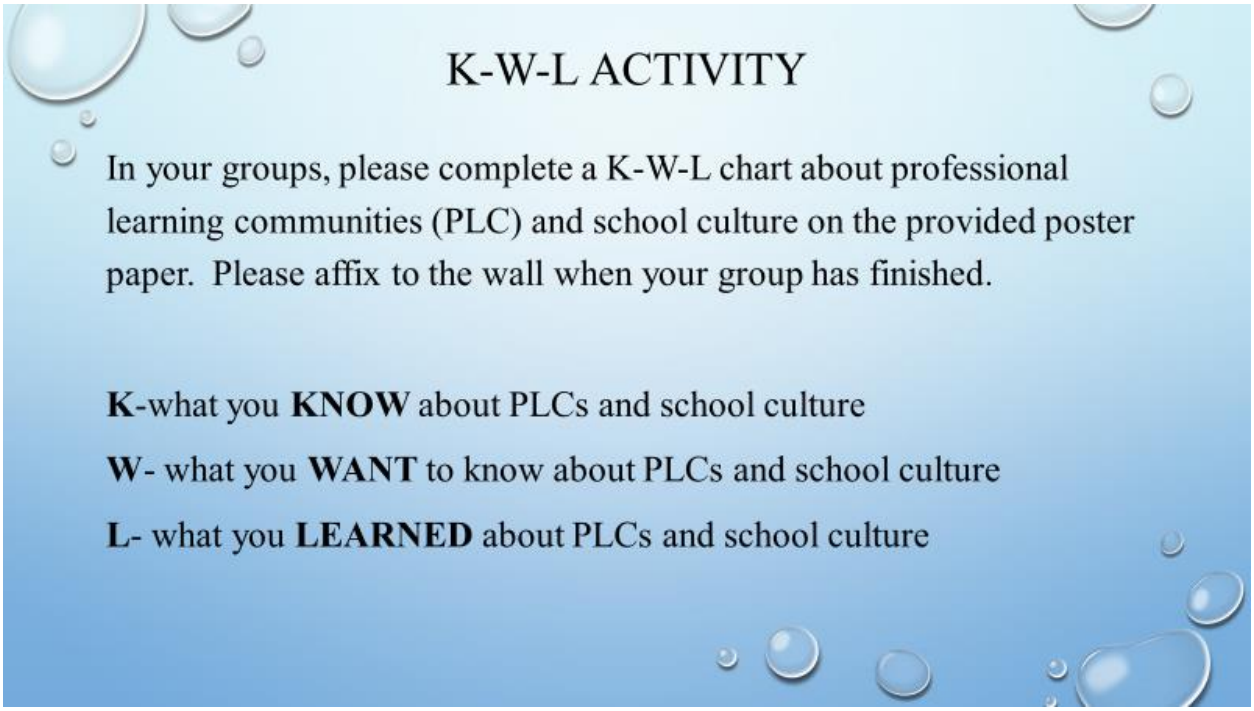

Professional Development
3-Day Training
PLCs and School Culture
AUGUST 2017
DAY 2

Slide 8


I AM UNIQUE-ICE BREAKER ACTIVITY
To help staff discover each person's individuality, answer the following questions:
What kind of car do you drive?
Where is your dream vacation destination?
What are your two favorite dessert?
What is something that really bothers you?
What is something you enjoy?
Why did you become a teacher?
A teacher is a …?
Once you have completed the questions, please popcorn around the room and share with three other participants. Please keep it to 3-5 minutes per person.
https://ccie-catalog.s3.amazonaws.com/library/5009121.pdf

Slide 9



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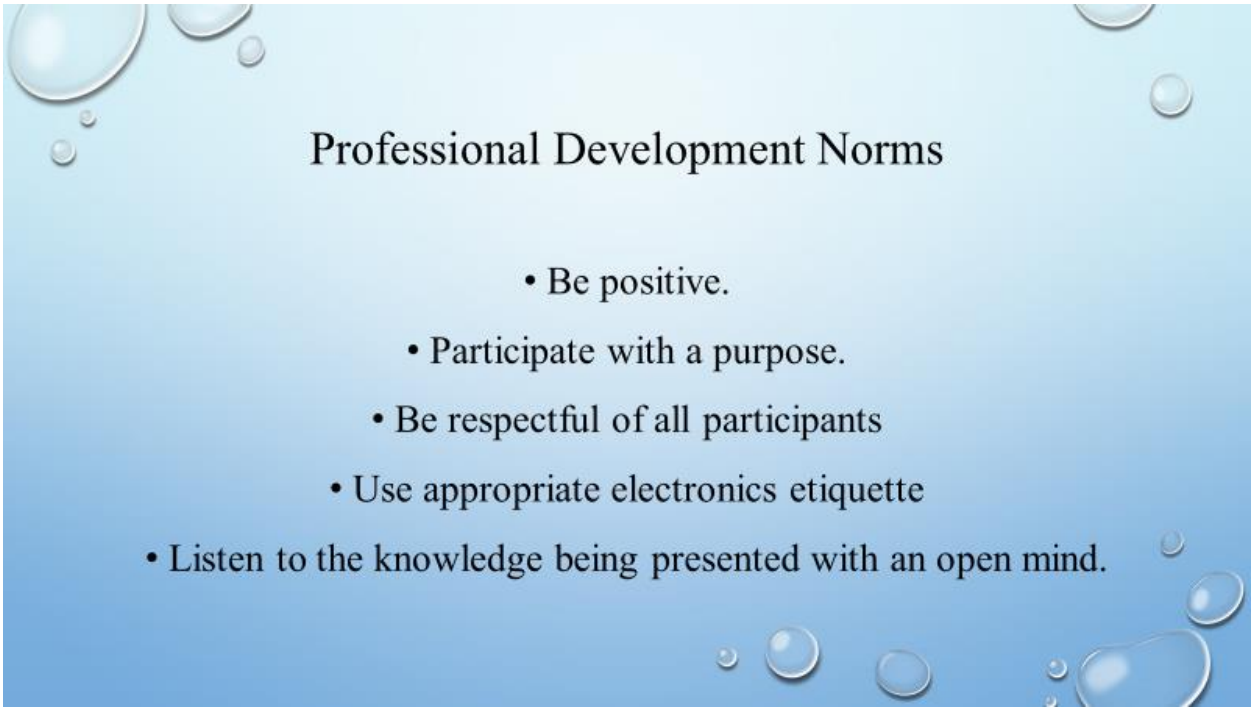
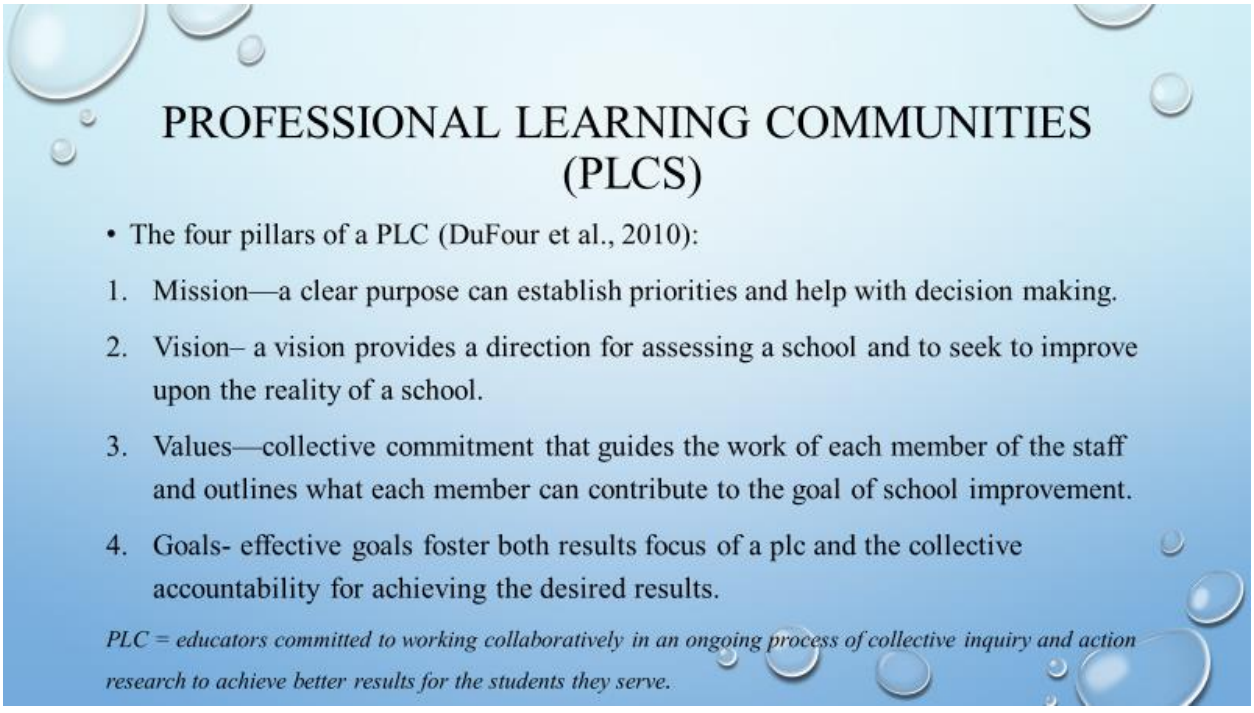
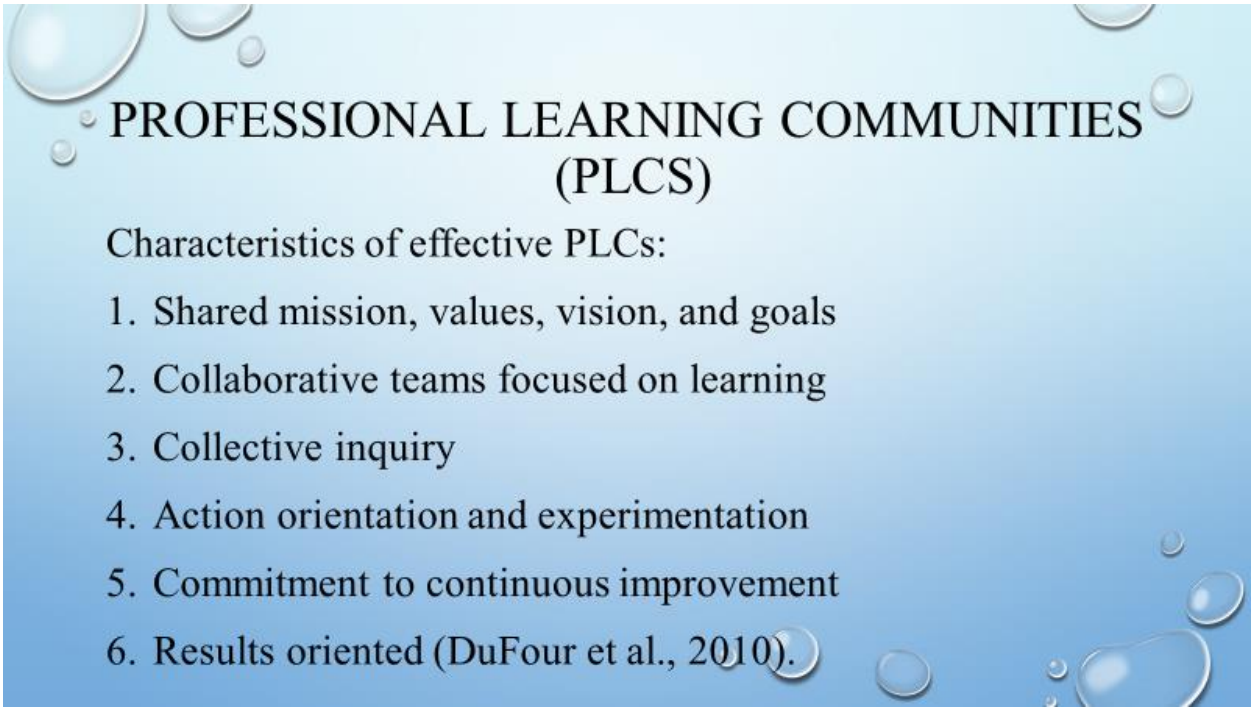

Professional Development Norms
• Be positive.
• Participate with a purpose.
• Be respectful of all participants
• Use appropriate electronics etiquette
• Listen to the knowledge being presented with an open mind.

Slide 11


PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES (PLCS)
• The four pillars of a PLC (DuFour et al., 2010):
1. Mission—a clear purpose can establish priorities and help with decision making.
2. Vision– a vision provides a direction for assessing a school and to seek to improve upon the reality of a school.
3. Values—collective commitment that guides the work of each member of the staff and outlines what each member can contribute to the goal of school improvement.
4. Goals- effective goals foster both results focus of a plc and the collective accountability for achieving the desired results.
PLC = educators committed to working collaboratively in an ongoing process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.

Slide 12



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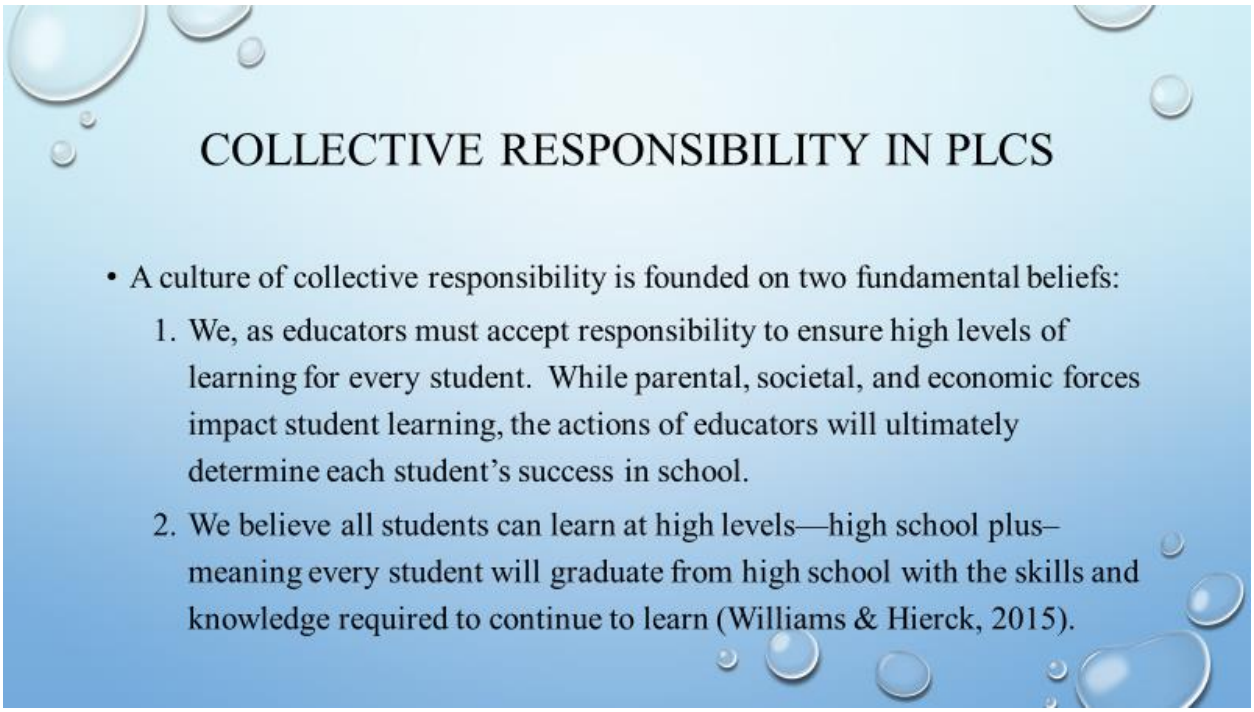

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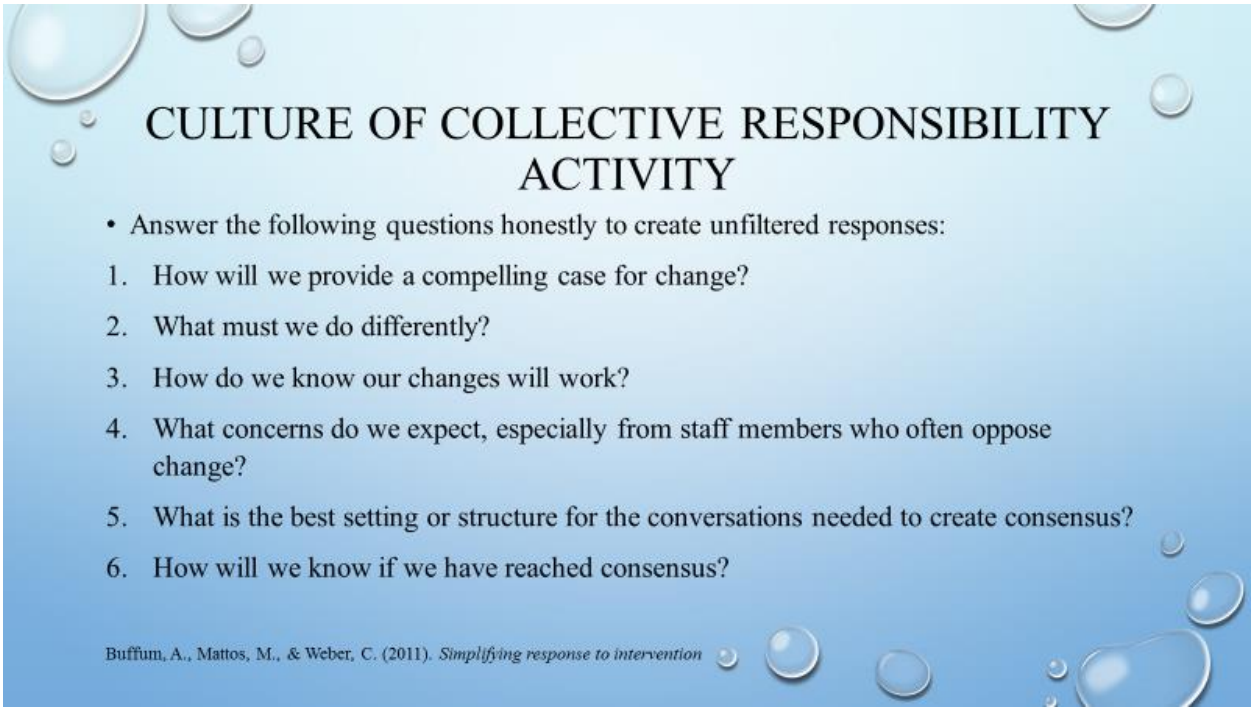

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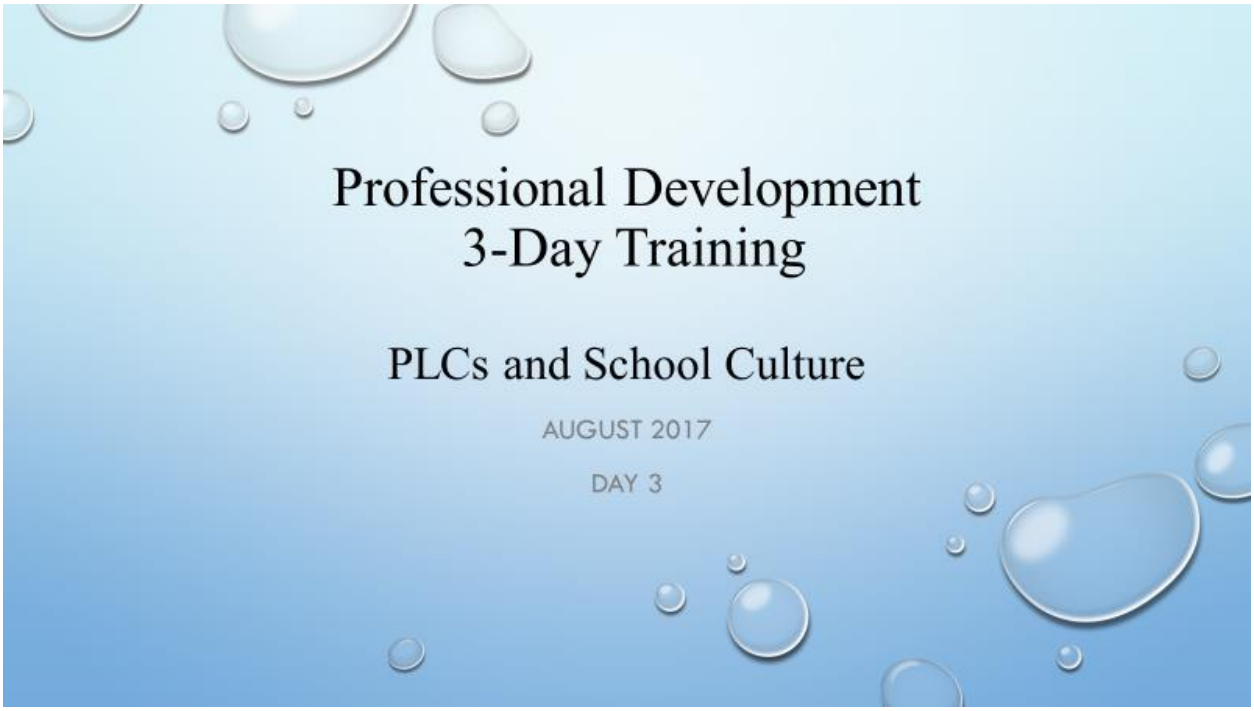
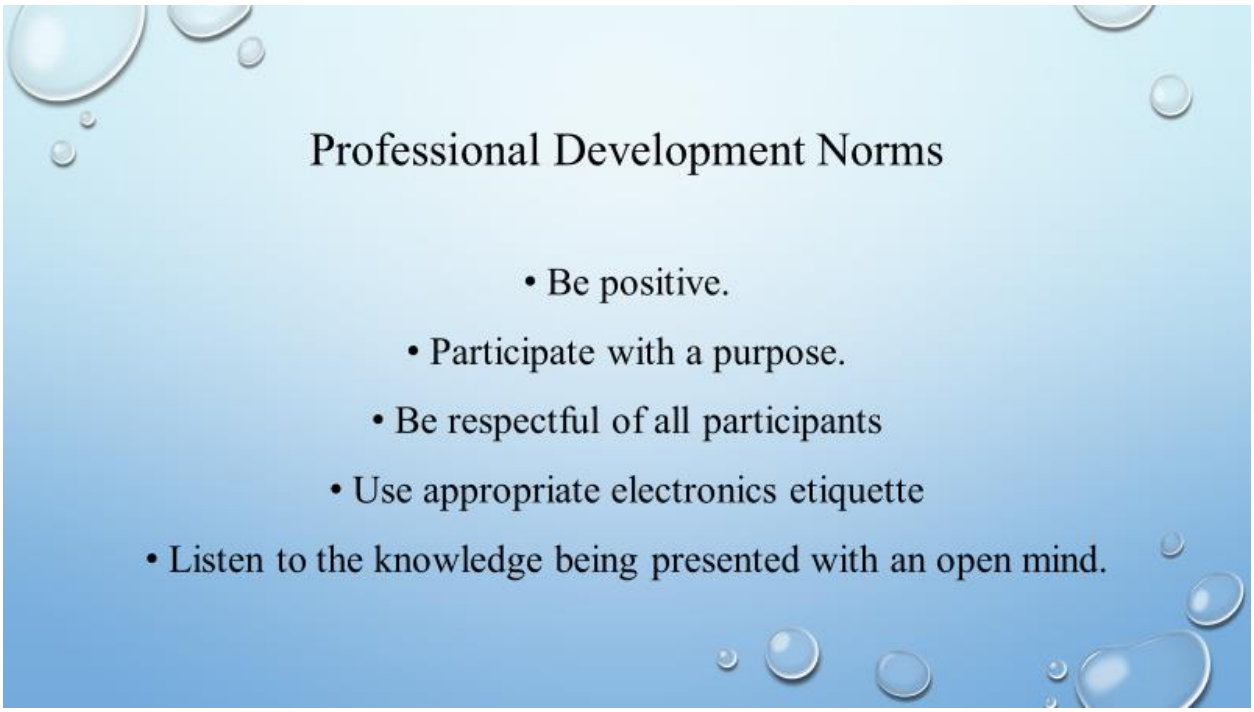

Professional Development
3-Day Training
PLCs and School Culture
AUGUST 2017
DAY 3

Slide 16


Professional Development Norms
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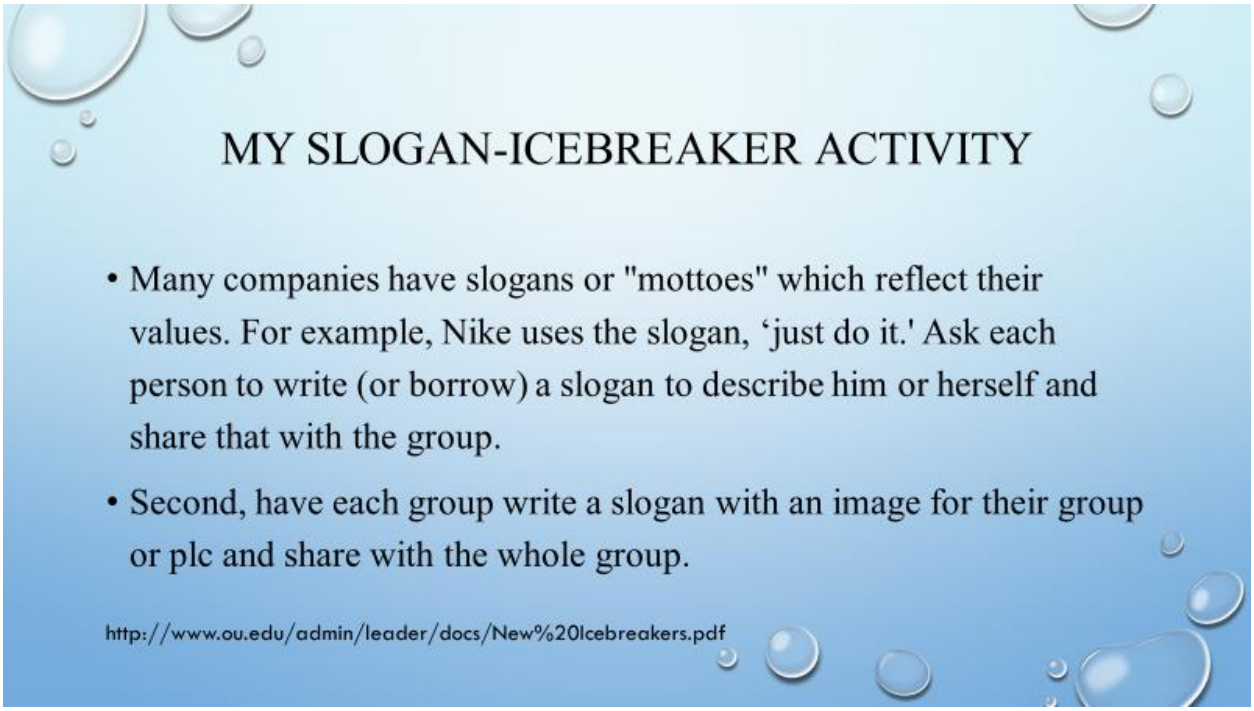
Slide 17



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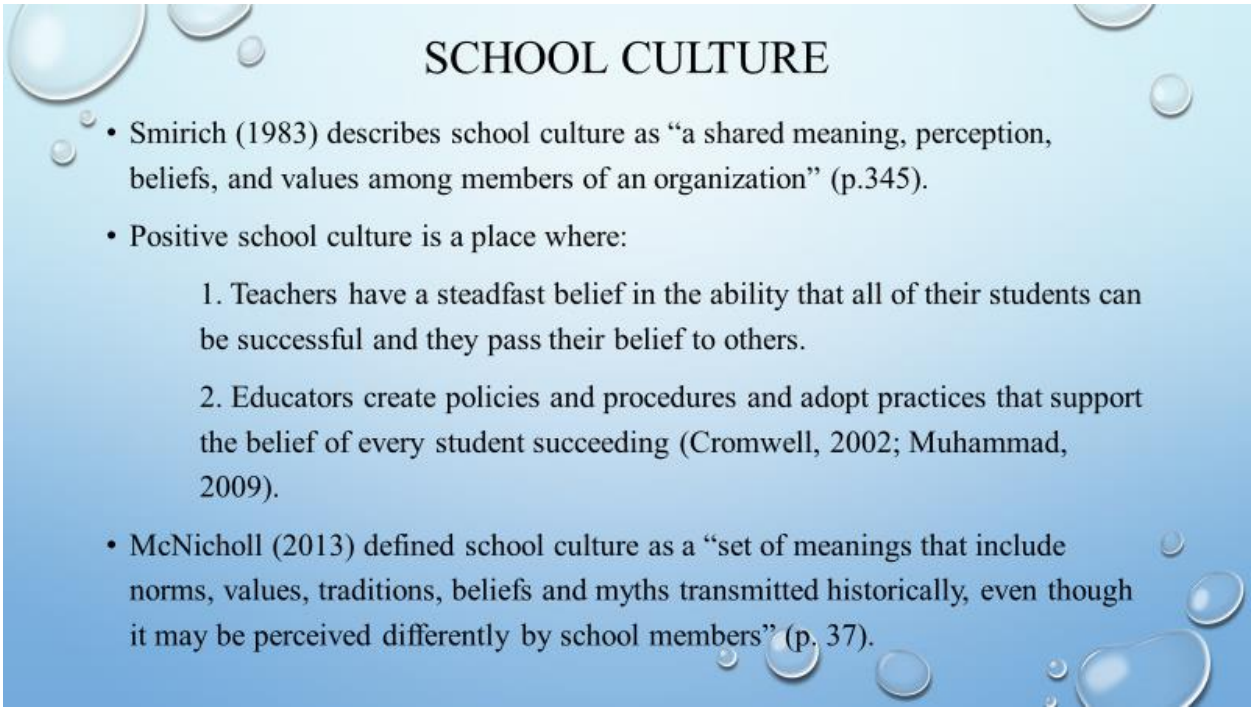
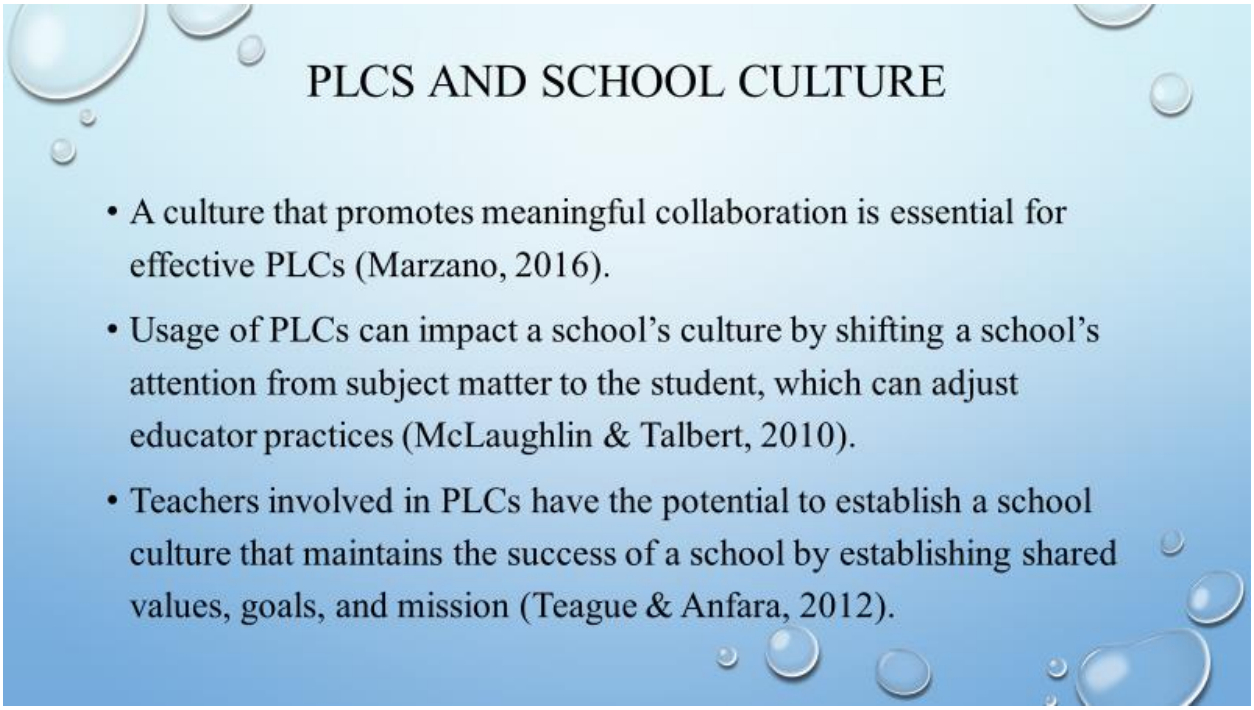
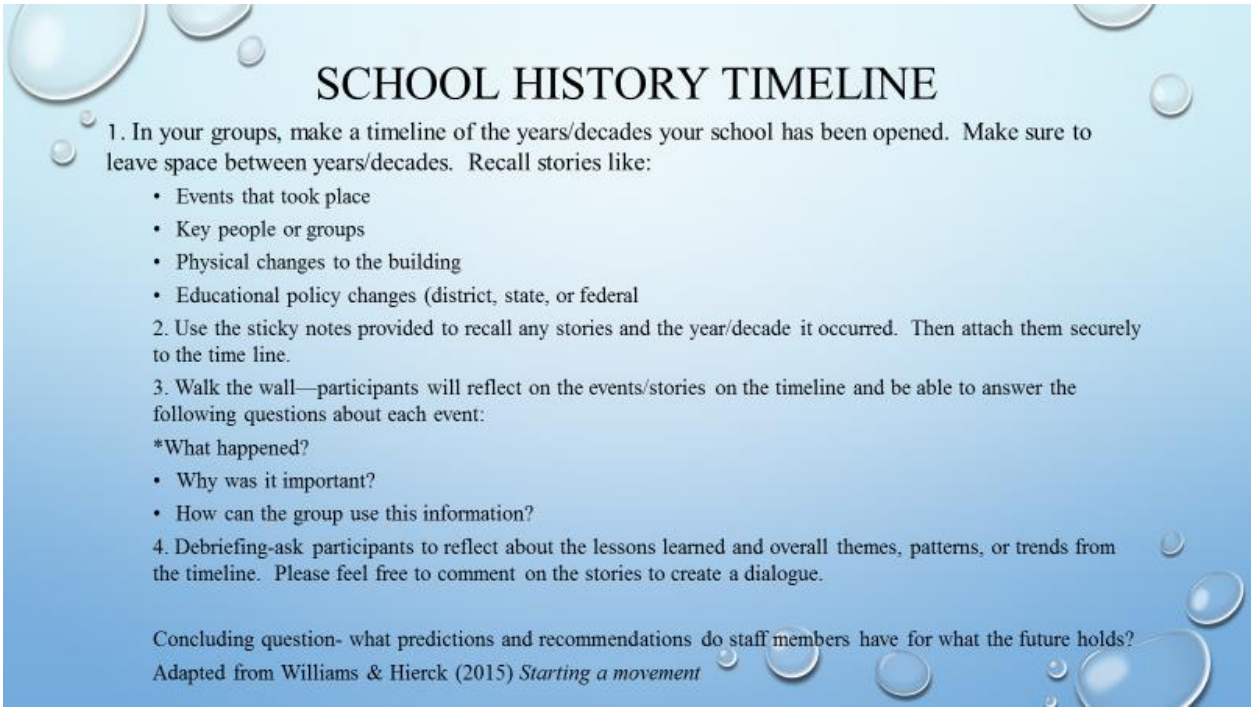

SCHOOL CULTURE
• Smirich (1983) describes school culture as "a shared meaning, perception, beliefs, and values among members of an organization" (p.345).
• Positive school culture is a place where:
1. Teachers have a steadfast belief in the ability that all of their students can be successful and they pass their belief to others.
2. Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support the belief of every student succeeding (Cromwell, 2002; Muhammad, 2009).
• McNicholl (2013) defined school culture as a "set of meanings that include norms, values, traditions, beliefs and myths transmitted historically, even though it may be perceived differently by school members" (p. 37).

Slide 19


PLCS AND SCHOOL CULTURE
• A culture that promotes meaningful collaboration is essential for effective PLCs (Marzano, 2016).
• Usage of PLCs can impact a school's culture by shifting a school's attention from subject matter to the student, which can adjust educator practices (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2010).
• Teachers involved in PLCs have the potential to establish a school culture that maintains the success of a school by establishing shared values, goals, and mission (Teague & Anfara, 2012).

Slide 20



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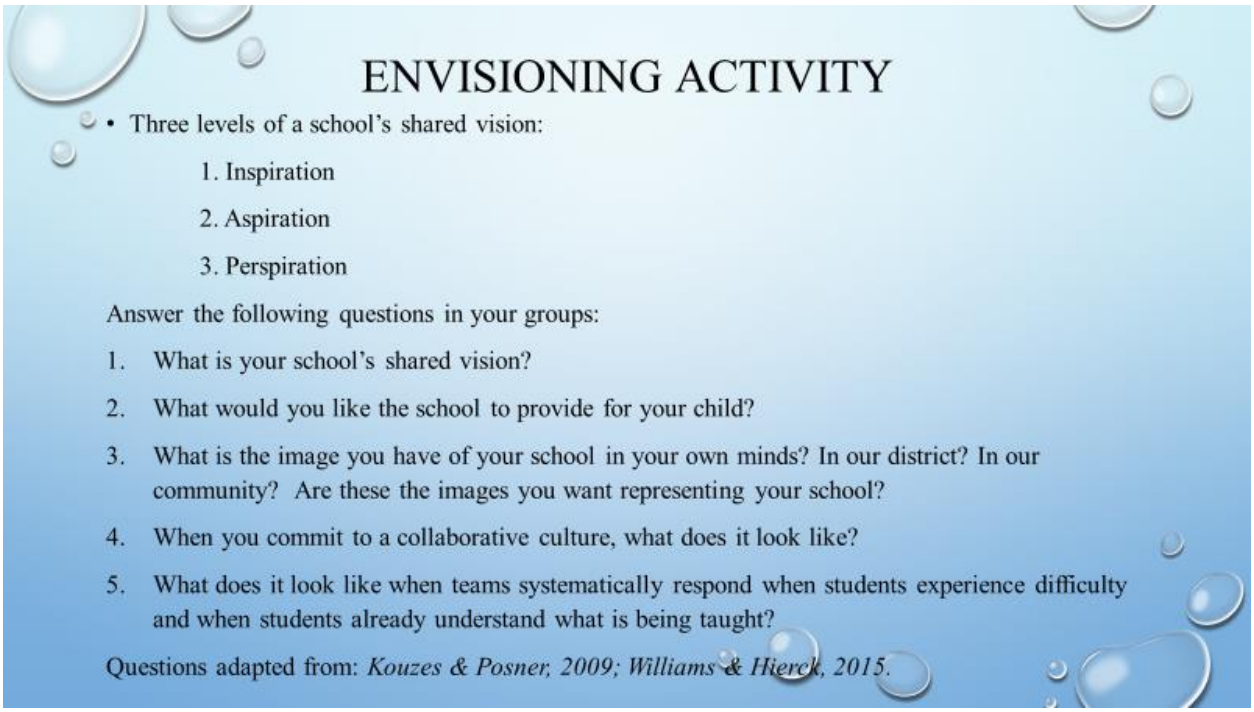

Appendix B: PLC and School Culture— Creswell's Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:

Date of Interview:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

(Briefly describe the research study, confidentiality, and informed consent)

Before the interview begins, remember to greet and introduce yourself to the interviewee.

"I am conducting a research study to examine the impact PLCs have on school culture through the perceptions and experiences of teachers. Thank you for reviewing and

signing the informed consent form, which provides details about the study, confidentiality, and the factors associated with your participation in the study. Please remember, throughout the study and its subsequent findings, your identity will remain confidential. If at any time, you want to leave the study, you are free to do so. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them now or contact my chair or me using the information of the informed consent form."

Interview Questions:

1. Please describe your background in education?
2. You have been involved in PLCs for at least two years. Based on your experiences and what you know about Professional Learning Communities, what do feel are the strengths and weaknesses of using PLCs as an organizational model?
3. Describe the methods utilized by your PLC to ensure effective and efficient use of your time at school? Follow-up: If no methods are identified, what methods would you like to see utilized?
4. Describe your professional learning community experiences as it pertains to collaboration and communication.
5. What is the most positive and most negative aspect of being a part of your PLC?
6. School culture has been described as "shared values, norms, practices, and mission". Please describe the school culture within your PLC and school as a whole.

   Sub question- Has the culture of your school changed since you have been a member of the faculty and a PLC?
7. What makes your PLC effective or ineffective in the goal of improving or sustaining your school's culture?
8. How does your PLC and other PLCs among your school impact school culture?
9. How do you perceive the school leadership's responsibilities impact the culture of the school? Follow up question: What aspects or duties of the school leadership team do you feel impact the culture of the school?
10. If you could give advice to another team about how to establish or maintain a school culture effectively with the use of PLCs, what advice would you give?

Closing Statement:

"Thank you so much for assisting me with a doctoral study by agreeing to complete this interview. In about two weeks, I will ask you to assist in the member check process, where you check for the accuracy of your interview responses, at a later date. This process typically takes 15-20 minutes. Thanks again and have a great day."

Appendix C: PLC Meeting Observation Form

Date_____ PLC: _____

What was the focus of the meeting?

Was a meeting agenda displayed or distributed? Y__N__

Before the meeting proceeded, were the PLC norms addressed or were the norms implied due to the time of year the meeting occurred?

During the meeting, was it evident that an established culture (shared values, norms, practices, etc.) was present? If so, what is the evidence?

During the PLC meeting, was school culture addressed? Y_____N_____

If school culture was addressed during the meeting, what was stated about it and what strategies were discussed to enhance it?

Were any roadblocks, conflicts or distractions present during the PLC meeting? How were they addressed if present during the meeting?

What is the amount and quality of interactions among PLC members?

Other topics addressed:

Appendix D: Participant Email Invitation and Consent Form

Dear Teacher:

You are invited to take part in a research study about educator perceptions on the impact Professional Learning Communities have on school culture. The researcher is inviting teachers who have been a part of a content Professional Learning Community for at least two years at the study's research site. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Jerry P. Kociuruba Jr., who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You might already know the researcher as a teacher at your current school, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to examine the understanding of how Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) impact a school's culture through the perception of PLC teachers.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- _____ to participate in a one-on-one interview lasting roughly 20-30 minutes.
- _____ to be a part of the member checking process by going over your transcribed interview to ensure the validity of the data collected. This process may take 15-20 minutes.

Here are some sample questions:

- You have been involved in PLCs for at least two years. Based on your experiences and what you know about Professional Learning Communities, what do feel are the strengths and weaknesses of using PLCs as an organizational model?
- School culture has been described as "shared values, norms, practices, and mission". Please describe the culture within your PLC and school as a whole.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision regarding whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at [redacted] School District and [redacted] High School will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. The researcher will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether they were selected for the study.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
Being in this study involves minimal risk such as the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life. Being in this study will not pose a risk to your safety or well-being

The benefit of this study will allow for the examination of PLCs and school culture to aid in the implementation and sustainment Professional Learning Communities in a way that improves the learning environments at the research site.

Payment:
For being a part of this study, I would like to thank the individuals for their participation with a thank you gift of a $20 Gift Card to a local establishment. Gift cards will be distributed in person at the conclusion of each participant's interview.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. In addition, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. In addition, pseudonyms will be used in the study report to protect the

identity of the participants. Data will be kept on a password-protected flash drive and stored in an off-site locked file cabinet at the researcher's home. In addition, the interviews will be audio-recorded for later transcription. The transcribed interviews and recording device will also be stored off-site in a locked file cabinet. Data will be kept for a period of at least five years, as required by the university and then destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via (xxx) xxx-xxxx and jerry.kociurubajr@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is (xxx)-xxx-xxxx. Walden University's approval number for this study is **09-14-16-0448637** and it expires on **September 13, 2017.**
The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please indicate your consent to participate by responding to this email with the words 'I Consent'.

Thank for your time and have a great day,
Jerry Kociuruba, M.Ed.
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix E: Permission to Conduct Research

Dear Mrs. [redacted]:

My name is Jerry Kociuruba and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. As a part of my doctoral research regarding the examination of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and school culture, I would like to interview members of the faculty. Particularly, I would like to interview at least ten teachers who have been a part of a PLC for at least two years. I am respectfully requesting permission to provide your teachers with an opportunity to participate in an important study.

I am aware of the demands and expectations upon busy teachers and can assure you that the time required to complete the interviews is minimal, taking approximately 30 minutes. To collect the data both efficiently and with minimal interruption, I would like to interview the teachers before or after the school day. In addition, I would like to make observations of Professional Learning Community meetings to add to the data collected from the interviews.

My research includes procedural safeguards and confidentiality as required by Walden University's Institutional Review Board. Transcribed interviews will remain confidential with the participants receiving a pseudonym to represent them in the study and all collected data will be stored securely for five years as required by Walden University. Following the five years, all data will be destroyed.

It is my hope that the responses and participation of your teachers will help fill the void in research regarding Professional Learning Communities and school culture.

Please indicate your permission for your teachers to participate in this important research. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Best regards,

Jerry P. Kociuruba Jr.
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

_____My Permission is granted to interview the teachers and make PLC meeting observations

_____My permission is not granted to interview the teachers and make PLC meeting observations

_____ _____

(Principal or Designee Signature) (Date)