THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER

LEADERSHIP WITHIN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

COMMUNITIES: A CULTURAL THEORY

PERSPECTIVE

By

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Viktor Frankl stated in his book *Man's Search for Meaning* (1946), õWhat man actually needs is not a tensionless state but rather a striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal, a freely chosen taskö (p.110). My doctoral journey has been just thatí striving and struggling for a worthwhile goal. *So shall it be written, so shall it be done*!

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Title of Study: THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER LEADERSHIP WITHIN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: A CULTURAL THEORY PERSPECTIVE

Major Field: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Abstract: The purpose of this study was through cultural theory, to explore principalsø and teachersøroles in professional learning communities in selected school contexts. Professional learning communities (PLCs) are powerful models designed to promote system-wide school improvement. While PLCs are designed to promote system-wide school improvement, research indicated that these goals are accomplished in some instances (DuFour et al., 2005; Saphier, 2005; Schmoker, 2005), and not accomplished in others (Carroll, 2010; Chenowith, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Sims & Penny, 2015; Supovitz & Christman, 2003; Talbert, 2011). One way to explain these discrepancies is through cultural theory, which posits that cultural membersøroles and the rules associated with those roles are important variables in contextual practices and interactions (Douglas, 1995; Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005; Harris, 2005). For example, teachersø and principalsøroles may inhibit or promote the success of PLCs in a given school environment. (Fullan, 2006; Hord, 2004; Leithwood, & Riehl, 2003). This study used naturalistic inquiry methods (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993), which allows the researcher to understand the everyday life of the people involved in the educational environment. The naturalistic inquiry method was chosen to provide a holistic picture of what the impact is on the lives of the teachers, school culture, and the principal, within the school context. This study was bound to two middle schools and explored the PLC structure, through Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Research indicates that professional learning communities (PLCs) are powerful models that can be instrumental in system-wide school improvement. (DuFour & Marzano, 2011; Saphier, 2005; Schmoker, 2005). Astuto, Clark, Read, McGree, and Fernandez (1993) described a professional community of learners in terms of teachers and administrators in a school who continuously seek and share knowledge and then act on what they learn. The goal of these interactions is to enhance the teachersø and administratorsø effectiveness as professionals so that students benefit (Hord, 2007; Schlechty, 2009; Thessin & Starr, 2011).

In a PLC, educators have time allotted in their schedules to meet with other teachers to collaborate about curriculum, summative and formative assessments, student interventions and enrichment opportunities for students. These meetings usually occur weekly and provide opportunities for teachers to delve into student longitudinal assessment data to identify areas for improvement. Because of its complexity, the PLC model requires on-going professional development for teachers and administrators to effectively utilize professional learning time. Within schools, the principalsø leadership role in creating a culture conducive to student learning, is vitally important for the continued growth of teachers and students (Glickman, 2002; Hoy & Woolfork, 1993). Developing the capacity of individuals and staff members to engage in meaningful reform and restructuring to benefit students continues to be the challenge for school leaders (Huffman, 2003).

Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003) identified 21 specific leadership responsibilities that are significantly correlated with teachersø collective efficacy and ultimately student achievement. Abrego and Pankake (2011) narrows the list to the following five leadership responsibilities necessary for the successful implementation of a professional learning community: (a) culture, the ability to foster shared beliefs and a sense of community; (b) focus, the ability to establish clear goals and keep these goals at the forefront of the schooløs attention; (c) communication, ability to develop strong lines of communication with teachers and students; (d) outreach, advocating and being a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders; and (e) affirmation, the ability to recognize and celebrate school accomplishments and acknowledging school failures. Each of these leadership responsibilities have been shown to support the professional learning community model.

Statement of the Problem

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are powerful models designed to promote system-wide school improvement. While PLCs are designed to promote system-wide school improvement, research indicated that these goals are accomplished in some instances (DuFour et al., 2005; Saphier, 2005; Schmoker, 2005), and not accomplished in others (Carroll, 2010; Chenowith, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Sims & Penny, 2015; Supovitz & Christman, 2003; Talbert, 2011). One way to explain these discrepancies is through cultural theory, which posits that cultural membersø roles and the rules associated with those roles are important variables in contextual practices and interactions (Douglas, 1995; Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005; Harris, 2005). For example, teachersø and principalsø roles may inhibit or promote the success of PLCs in a given school environment. (Fullan, 2006; Hord, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was through cultural theory, to explore principalsø and teachersø roles in professional learning communities in selected school contexts.

Research Questions

1. In each school studied, how is the professional learning community structured?

    a. What are the teachersø roles in the PLC?

    b. What is the principaløs role in the PLC?

2. How do principal and teacher roles in the PLC interrelate with cultures of each school?

3. How does Douglasøs (1982) Cultural Theory explain the above?

Epistemological Perspective

Constructionism is the epistemological perspective informing this study. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as õthe view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, developed and transmitted within an essentially social contextö (p.42). In relation to this study, knowledge will be constructed by observing and interacting with teachers and principals within the professional learning community. This study used naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993), which allows the researcher to understand the everyday life of the people involved in the educational environment. This study featured close interactions with human subjects and their perceptions of specific situations, processes, and occurrences.

Theoretical Framework

Anfara and Mertz (2015) indicated that õtheory plays a key role in framing and conducting almost every aspect of the studyö (p.11). This study used Douglasøs (1982, 1986) grid and group typology, also referred to as Cultural Theory (CT). Grid and group typology (Douglas, 1982, 1986) was originally used in cultural anthropology in order to understand the dynamics of culture and social changes (Schwarz & Thompson, 1990). This framework also serves in comprehending school culture and learning environments (Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005; Harris, 2005). In Douglasøs (1982, 1986) frame, grid refers to the degree to which an individualøs choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions such as role expectations, rules, and procedures. Grid can be plotted

on a continuum from strong to weak. In strong- grid environments, teachers typically do not have the freedom to select their own curricula and textbooks, and many decisions are made at the upper levels of administration. At the weak end of the grid continuum, teachers are given much more autonomy in choosing curricula, texts and instructional methods. Douglas (1982, 1986) suggests four criteria to determine grid classification: isolation, autonomy, control, and competition.

The concept of õgroupö takes into account the holistic picture of the social unit in the culture under study. According to Harris (2005), õGroup represents the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit.ö (p.36). Like grid, group has a continuum of strong to weak. In strong-group environments, specific membership criteria exist, and explicit pressures influence collective relationships. In weak-group environments, the pressure for group-focused activities and relationships is relatively low. Douglas (1982) distinguishes this by writing that õthe strongest effects of group are to be found where an environment incorporates a person with the rest by implicating them together in common residence, shared work, shared resources and creation, and by inserting control over marriage and kinshipö (p.202). In this type of environment the school is the center of the town. Douglas (1982, 1986) suggested that group is identified by four criteria: survival, membership, life support, and allegiance. Harris (1995) concluded that the application of Douglasø (1982, 1986) model was productive in placing school in one of the four quadrants. This research was driven by the question, õIs the model fruitful for describing and analyzing educational settings?ö (Harris, 1995, p. 639). According to Harris (1995),

> The model is fruitful. It portrays the interplay of two powerful cultural dimensions inherent in any educational setting. Of particular interest to educators would be the question, ʻdoes culture influence teaching and learning?ø (p. 640)

In the typology, grid and group provide a productive lens to explore teacher engagement, communication and community. Grid reflects the degree of freedom and autonomy that participants experience, and group reflects the degree of community each participant promotes. Douglasø

typology õhelps educators meet conceptual and methodological challenges inherent in cultural inquiry

and educational practiceö (Harris, 2006, p.131). Applying grid and group to professional learning

communities will provide a way to explain the cultural characteristics of these communities. Figure 1

illustrates the characteristics of Douglasøs grid and group frame.

Figure 1. Quadrants illustrate the characteristics of communities based on the interactions and the structures of authority present in each context. Adapted from "How schools succeed: Context, culture, and strategic leadership." (Harris, 2015).
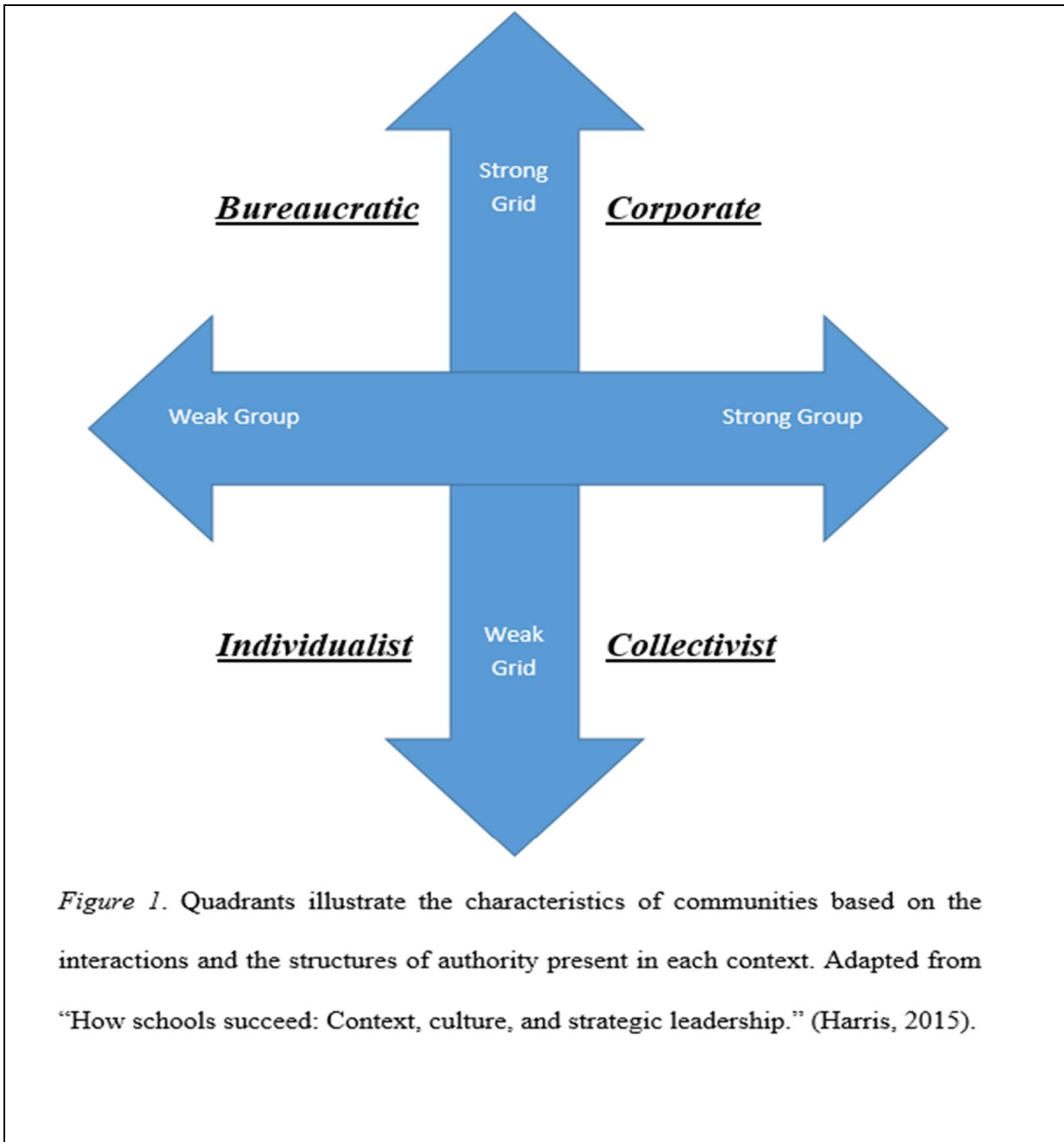
Procedures

For this study, naturalistic inquiry methods were used. According to Erlandson, et al. (1993),

Naturalistic research involves utilizing what one comes into the world with (i.e., the five

senses plus intuition) to gather, analyze, and construct reality from the data. The primary

instrument in this type of research is the researcher him or herself. Relying on all its senses,

intuition, thoughts, and feelings, the human instrument can be very potent and perceptive

data-gathering tool. (p.82)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended four criteria for establishing trustworthiness of findings in

qualitative case studies to include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each

of these criteria were incorporated throughout the study. For credibility, I implemented the techniques

recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985): prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer

debriefing, member checks, purposive sampling, and triangulation. For transferability, I provided a

õthick descriptionö which is a technique first introduced by Ryle (1949) and later elaborated by

Geertz (1973). I described the setting, context, participants, research design and results so the reader

can best determine if this study is relevant to their setting and situation. Specifically, is it relevant to

their schooløs professional learning community?

To ensure dependability and confirmability, all documents, notes, transcripts, recorded

interviews, and observations are available for an extensive audit if needed. Data was collected

through documents such as papers containing the mission statement, electronic communication

among staff members, handouts in the front offices, newsletters, and other sources that help explain

school culture or describe professional learning communities. Creswell (2009) effectively

summarized the advantages of collecting documents in which it (a) enables a researcher to obtain the

language and words of participants, (b) can be accessed at a time convenient to researcher óan

unobtrusive source of information, (c) represents data which are thoughtful in that participants have

given attention to compiling them, and (d) is written evidence, it saves a researcher time and expense

of transcribing (p. 180). Principal and teacher interviews were completed at the school site during an

available and convenient time for the research study participant. This occurred during the school day and after school hours. Interviews consisted of six questions, as well as follow up questions throughout the interview. All interviews were face- to face and completed at the school site. These interviews were completed in the participant's classroom and/or office or the school conference room.

During the data collection process, observations were conducted on a formal and informal basis. Observational data were collected during multiple visits to school sites. Observational data included a variety of activities, events, and settings. Observational data were collected from PLC meetings. Observational data were recorded through detailed field notes. The field notes taken during and immediately following observations were analyzed along with interview transcripts. Creswell (2009) referred to data collection as õan ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data, asking analytical questions, and writing memos throughout the studyö (p.184). I followed his six-step process for data analysis: organize and prepare data, read through data, code data, generate themes or categories, convey findings, and interpret meaning.

Significance of the Study

Significance to Practice

The professional learning community (PLC) can be an effective school reform model (Dufour et al., 2005; Saphier, 2005; Schmoker, 2005). The PLC model encourages purposeful collaboration among the administrators and teachers and provides the conditions necessary for the synergy that drives school improvement. Improved student achievement is one instance where research has demonstrated that educators who work collaboratively produce an effect on student results that is greater than the sum of individual teacher effort (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Fullan, 2005; Saphier, 2005). The results of this study informs university programs, administrators, and teachers, how principal and teacher roles support or inhibit PLCs. With over 20 years in education, 12 involved as a school administrator, my own interest and attention has brought about the desire to ensure every professional learning community is highly effective in its implementation and sustainability.

Significance to Research

A large body of research exists on school culture, professional learning communities, and educators' roles independently. However, there is limited research that suggests the specific role of school culture in supporting professional learning communities. The present study adds to the existing research on the topic by providing an additional perspective regarding how elements of school culture, specifically cultural theory (Douglas, 1982, 1986), and principal and teacher leadership roles support or inhibit the educational practices of a professional learning community.

Significance to Theory

This study was undertaken because of three concerns: (1) there is a lack of research and knowledge outlining how Mary Douglas' grid and group typology (1982, 1986) and culture affect PLCs, (2) not all school environments promote positive professional learning communities, (3) and not every educational leader is equipped with the skills and training to successfully implement and sustain system-wide school improvement. Results of this study could add to the existing research on PLCs with an emphasis on the role of leaders in promoting or inhibiting a collaborative school culture.

Definition of Terms

- *Bureaucratic (Strong-Grid/ Weak-Group) Environments*: Environment that offers little autonomy to members. Cultural preference is authoritarianism (Harris, 2015).

- *Collectivist* (*Weak- Grid/ Strong- Group*) *Environments*: Environment where members place high value on unity, equal distribution of resources, conformity to norms of group and rejection of authoritarian leadership and hierarchy (Harris, 2015).

- *Corporate (Strong-Grid/ Strong-Group) Environments*: Environment where social relationships and experiences are influenced by boundaries maintained by the group against outsiders (Harris, 2015).

- *Educational Practices*: the wide range of individual activities, policies, and programmatic approaches to achieve positive changes in student attitudes or academic behaviors (Arendale, 2016).

- *Grid:* represents the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions such as role expectations, rules, and procedures (Harris, 2015).

- *Grid/ Group Cultural Theory:* a cultural model developed by anthropologist Mary Douglas (1982) developed to show how native rituals and practices were relevant to modern society.

- *Group:* represents the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unit (Harris, 2015).

- *Individualist (Weak- Grid/ Weak-Group) Environments*: Environment that encourages members to seek risks that result in personal gain and to be competitive and proactive in carving their future in life (Harris, 2015).

- *Principal:* the leader or head of an educational institution, who manages the overall operation of schools, including building maintenance and cafeteria services, academic curriculum, and ensures all teachers have necessary resources and equipment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015).

- *Professional Learning Community:* The PLC structure is one of continuous adult learning, strong collaboration, democratic participation, and consensus about the school environment and culture (Barth, 2006: DuFour, 2004).

- *School Culture:* determined by the values, shared beliefs, and behaviors of the various stakeholders within the school's community and reflects the school's social norms (Groseschl & Doherty, 2000).

- *Teacher Efficacy*: belief that teacher can positively affect the learning of students (Hoy & Woolfork, 1993).

Summary of the Study

Professional educators will continue to search for effective school reforms in an attempt to increase student learning and teacher collective efficacy. One effective reform is the professional learning community (PLC) model. The PLC model encourages purposeful collaboration among the administrators and teachers and provides the conditions necessary for the synergy that drives school improvement (Dufour, 2005; Dufour & Eaker, 2006). Improved student achievement is one instance where research has demonstrated that educators who work collaboratively produce an effect on student results that is greater than the sum of individual teacher effort (Fullan, 2005; Hattie, 2012). The purpose of this study is through cultural theory, to explore principals' and teachers' roles in professional learning communities in selected school contexts. The research applies Mary Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory to the schools studied to further enhance the understanding of school culture within professional learning communities.

This study is organized in six chapters. Chapter I provides an introduction to the study with major components including the purpose of the study, the statement of the problem and the identification of three research questions. Chapter II provides an in depth review of the literature that will assist in understanding the research topic. Chapter III provides a description of the research methods used throughout the study. Chapter IV presents all data, including interviews, observations and field notes in detail. Chapter V analyzes the data through the grid and group typology of culture. Chapter VI concludes the study with interpretations and recommendations for future research in supporting the educational practices of professional learning communities.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this review is to present a synthesis of research and literature on (a) professional learning communities, (b) challenges within professional learning communities, and (c) Mary Douglasøs (1982) Cultural Theory. Throughout our educational history, political and educational leaders have searched for ways to improve the overall educational system to increase the academic achievement of students. There was a belief we, as a country, were not equipping our high school and college graduates with the skills that would ensure the United States could compete with other countries technologically. This resulted in significant federal funding being redirected toward creating a more rigorous and relevant curricula in our educational institutions. (Fritzberg, 2016). In 1983, the federal government published a report, *A Nation at Risk*. This document outlined concerns with our educational system, though this time, the focus was concerning our national economy rather than national security. Between these two campaigns by the federal government, were two decades of civil rights legislation. In the 1960øs, President Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA, 1965), emphasizing high standards and accountability for all schools. This act brought the educational inequalities including racial, gender, linguistic, socioeconomics, and õabilityö groups into the forefront of our consciousness (Fritzberg, 2016). With a focus on improving classroom instruction, educators realized many teachers were attempting to educate their students without assistance from their colleagues. The practice of teaching was one of isolation. As time passed and more accountability was introduced

by local and federal agencies (ESEA, 1965; ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2000), educators began considering a more collaborative approach in which to educate their students and ultimately improve student academic achievement. (DuFour, 2004).

The purpose of this study is through cultural theory, to explore principalsø and teachersø roles in a professional learning community in selected school contexts. The goals of the review are: (a) to describe how a professional learning community framework can be instrumental in system-wide school improvement, (b) to illustrate the enhanced importance of school culture, and (c) to express the need for the present study.

Professional Learning Communities

Federal educational reforms have been well documented throughout the history of our educational system; however, schools have also made changes with their professional practice at the local level (DuFour, 2004; Fullan, 2005). Recently a collaborative framework, known as professional learning communities, has been implemented by many educational communities. However, this idea of adult collaboration within an organization is not a novel concept. The idea of professional learning communities originated in the business sector with the belief that organizations can always improve and learn. And that collaboration within the organization was more effective and productive than individual efforts. According to Follett (1918),

> The individual is created by the social process and is daily nourished by that process. There is no such thing as a self-made man. What we possess as individuals is what is stored up from society, is the subsoil of social life.... Individuality is the capacity for union. The measure of individuality is the depth and breadth of true relation. I am an individual not as far as I am apart from, but as far as I am a part of other men. (p.62)

This collaborative framework for organizations was supported and outlined by Cook and Yanow (1996),

> Organizational learning refers to the capacity of an organization to do what it does, where what is learned is possessed not by individual members of the organization but by the

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aggregate itself. That is, when a group acquires the know-how associated with its ability

to carry out its collective activities, that constitutes organizational learning. (p. 438)

This ability of a group to carry out its collective activities increases the group's collective

efficacy for that specific task and ultimately increases organizational learning. This is the impetus

of professional learning communities. As Hattie (2012) outlined,

> Within a school, we need to collaborate to build a team working together to solve the
>
> dilemmas in learning, to collectively share and critique the nature and quality of evidence
>
> that shows our impact on student learning, and to cooperate in planning and critiquing
>
> lessons, learning intentions, and success criteria on a regular basis. (pp. 149-151)

Teaching in Isolation

For decades, school teachers were isolated in their classrooms without the opportunity to

engage in professional collaboration with their colleagues. With increased expectations and daily

demands to ensure every student's success, educators began to embrace collaborative school

cultures. This collaborative school culture created an environment that created a support system

for teachers to discuss and prepare for the daily challenges in the classroom. Birdwell (1965)

argued,

> The problem of dealing with variability in student abilities and accomplishments, during
>
> a school year, thus is vested in the classroom teacher, and one important component of
>
> his professional skill is ability to handle day-to-day fluctuations in the response to
>
> instruction by individual students and collectively by the classroom group. (p.975)

In the mid 1990's, a collaborative school culture framework was created (DuFour &

Eaker, 1998) and this framework, known as a professional learning community, was shown to

increase the collective efficacy of teachers and ultimately increase student academic achievement.

Many schools have implemented this PLC model and have experienced a cultural shift within

their schools. Fullan (2008) posited PLCs could increase the collective efficacy and trust within

schools, only if they were focused on the right work to be done. Today schools are using various

forms of the professional learning community in order to improve educational practices through enhanced communication and collaboration among teachers.

The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift, from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, has profound implications for schools (DuFour, 2004). As DuFour outlines, this shift from a focus on teaching to the focus on learning, is a major paradigm shift for all educators introduced to the PLC model. Specifically, professional learning communities have shown to increase teachers' personal, interpersonal, and organizational capacities and their belief of executing instructional strategies to ensure every student is achieving academic progress (Pancucci, 2008).

Traits of PLCs

So what are some of the traits and characteristics of a professional learning community? According to Barth (2006),

> The PLC structure is one of continuous adult learning, strong collaboration, democratic participation, and consensus about the school environment and culture. In such a collegial culture, educators talk with one another about their practice, share knowledge, observe one another, and root for one another's success. (p.126)

This environment of collaboration may actually look very different from school site to school site. However, the basic tenets of a PLC should always have student learning at the forefront of all discussions. As DuFour and Eaker (1998) stated,

> Each word in the phrase professional learning community, describes the collaborative culture in a purposeful manner. A professional is someone who demonstrates expertise in a specialized field, learning suggests an ongoing quest of curiosity and continuous improvement, and a community supports each member and cultivates mutual support and the collective growth of the group. (pp.xi-xii)

According to Walker (2002), "At the school level, this sense of community is evidenced in a commitment to the growth of the faculty as a whole and to activities such as seminar groups, reflective writing, team research, and discussion" (p. 22). Team members are also encouraged to ask the following questions throughout their collaborative meetings:

1. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions should all students acquire as a result of the unit we are about to teach?

2. How much time will we devote to this unit?

3. How will we gather evidence of learning throughout the unit in our classrooms and at its conclusion as a team?

4. How can we use this evidence of learning to improve our individual practice and our team's collective capacity to help students learn, to intervene for students unable to demonstrate proficiency, and to enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency? (DuFour & Mattos, 2013, p.38)

Professional learning communities judge their effectiveness on the basis of results. Working together to improve the collective efficacy of teachers becomes the routine work of everyone in the school. Every teacher team participates in an ongoing process of identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing a goal to improve the current level, working together to achieve that goal and providing periodic evidence of progress (DuFour, 2004). As DuFour discusses, student data should be an integral piece to the professional learning community culture. Analyzing the data on a consistent basis and then being purposeful in developing a plan for improvement, is vital in the overall PLC process. Identified from his research, Hord (1996, 1997) outlined five major characteristics of a professional learning community: (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared values and vision, (c) collective learning and application of learning, (d) supportive conditions, and (e) shared practice. As we review each of Hord's PLC characteristics, we recognize the collaborative nature and language used to describe a professional learning community. This ongoing practice of professional

collaboration among teachers and administrators is a main characteristic of high functioning professional learning communities.

A school focused on supportive and shared leadership provides opportunities for their teachers to be involved in the decision-making process at the district and campus levels through various media. This may include campus and district level committee assignments. Within these committees, members are involved in the development of the vision and mission at the campus and district levels. There may also be teacher involvement in the district's strategic planning initiatives, which consists of developing, reviewing, and updating the mission and set of beliefs for the district. Within school environments, in which collective learning is a priority, teachers and administrators consistently have formal and informal discussion and meetings to address the different learning needs for all students. The adults within these environments are also involved in continuous improvement and professional development opportunities. Teachers, administrators, and central office staff participate and cultivate this collective learning throughout the school community. Supportive school leaders allocate time and resources toward building this collaborative learning culture throughout the school district (Abrego & Pankake, 2006).

Professional Collaboration

Within collaborative school cultures, professional learning communities are identified by professional collaboration to improve student learning. According to Leonard and Leonard (2001),

> Professional collaboration is evidenced when teachers and administrators work together, share their knowledge, contribute ideas and develop plans for purpose of achieving educational and organizational goals. In effect, collaborative practice is exemplified when school staff members come together on a regular basis in their continuing attempts to be more effective teachers so their students can become more successful learners. (p. 10)

The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This

simple shift, from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, has profound implications for schools (DuFour, 2004). As DuFour outlines, this shift from the focus on teaching to the focus on learning, is a major paradigm shift for all educators introduced to the PLC model.

This simple philosophy shift makes all the difference for student achievement. Louis and Kruse (1995) maintain that a core characteristic of professional learning communities is an unwavering focus on student learning and collaboration. As professional educators continue to search for new ways to improve their self-efficacy and ultimately increase student achievement, they must remember the main reason for creating collaborative educational environmentsí to cause student learning.

According to Barth (2002),

> The ability to learn prodigiously from birth to death sets human beings apart from other forms of life. The greatest purpose of school is to unlock, release, and foster this wonderful capacity. Schools exist to promote learning in all their inhabitants. Whether we are teachers, principals, professors, or parents, our primary responsibility is to promote learning in others and ourselves. (p. 9)

Challenges Within Professional Learning Communities

A professional learning community has been shown to be a powerful staff development approach and effective strategy for school change and improvement (Hord, 1997, 2004). Studies demonstrate that schools with strong professional learning communities produce important outcomes for student and school professionals (Crow et al., 2002; Toole & Louis, 2002). Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) studied student achievement in fourth grade math and reading and found fourth-grade students had higher achievement in both õwhen they attend schools characterized by higher levels of teacher collaboration for school improvementö (p.880). This holds true even when they accounted for student characteristics such as race, gender, or socioeconomic status (Goddard, Goddard, & Tscannen-Moran, 2007).

With professional educators searching for effective teaching strategies, the professional learning community framework is a viable option for educational institutions to implement for student and adult learning. As a review of extensive research on PLCs, the collective results of these studies offer an unequivocal answer to the question about whether the literature supports the assumption that student learning increases when teachers participate in professional learning communities. The answer is a resounding and encouraging yes (Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008).

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are designed to promote system-wide school improvement. While PLCs are designed to promote system-wide school improvement, research indicated that it accomplished this in some instances (DuFour et al, 2005; Saphier, 2005; Schmoker, 2005), and not accomplished in others (Carroll, 2010; Chenowith, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Sims & Penny, 2015; Supovitz & Christman, 2003; Talbert, 2011). Lezotte (as cited in DuFour et al., 2005) õí concluded that school reform could be neither successful nor sustainable unless it was embraced by the teachers, administrators, and support staff that define the professional learning communityö (p.182). Principals and teachers who collaborate will improve schools only when they are relentlessly focused on student learning (Carroll, 2010; Chenoweth, 2009; Hattie, 2009). To cultivate an effective professional learning community, principals must also foster shared leadership within the collaborative teams. Without effective leadership at the team level, the collaborative process may shift away from issues most critical to student learning (Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009).

PLC Sustainability

Professional learning communities, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right things they may end up being powerfully wrong (Fullan, 2007). In an article in Educational Leadership, Roland Barth (2006) also wrote,

> Relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character
> and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything elseí   The

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relationships among the educators in the school define all relationships within the

school's culture. (p. 8)

Fullan (2001) suggested that successful implementation of any program consists of 25% having

the right idea or vision and 75% implementing the right processes. If principals and other school

leaders are not knowledgeable and comfortable with the components of a PLC prior to

implementation, then the process with be ineffective and unsuccessful. There is definitely a need

for ongoing member training for the PLCs to maintain fidelity to its implementation. In

collaborative cultures that facilitated student success, a common feature was a persistent focus on

student learning and achievement by the teachers and administrators in the learning communities.

(Vescio & Adams, 2007) In communities where teachers worked together but did not engage in

structured work that was highly focused around student learning, similar gains were not evident

(Supovitz & Christman, 2003). Research has also determined simply providing classroom

teachers time to collaborate had no effect of teacher and student learning unless their meetings

were focused on the right work (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009).

Current research has shown the key components to maintaining and using a successful

PLC are trust, supportive collaboration, having a shared vision, and being practical and applicable

(Cranston, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Hawley & Rollie, 2007; Richmond & Monokore, 2011). All of

these characteristics must be in place for a professional learning community to sustain and

increase the collective efficacy of its members. Without these components, this results in an

ineffective collaborative culture and ultimately decreases student progress and achievement.

One of many challenges PLCs experience, includes the paradigm shift needed by

teachers. Traditionally, teaching has been one of autonomy which works against the collaborative

nature of PLCs (Little, 1982; Lortie, 1975; Smylie, 1994). When instruction has always been

viewed as private, introducing the idea of peer observations and consistent feedback, can be

challenging for veteran teachers. Another challenge is teacher turnover. Teacher turnover

undermines social cohesion and sustained teacher collaboration in the schools (Talbert, 2011).

Research conducted by Supovitz (2002) and Supovitz and Christman (2003), identified evidence of student learning by teachers in professional learning communities. This was true only for teachers who worked in teams or communities that focused on instructional practices and how they impacted student learning.

The professional learning community framework continues to offer school leaders a process to increase the collective efficacy of teachers. The on-going challenge is identifying barriers that may arise throughout the process. Professional learning communities are continuously evolving and when properly implemented and supported they become the school culture. As Deal (1999) stated, õCultureí itøs simply the way we do things around here.ö

Cultural Theory

Anfara and Mertz (2015) indicated that õtheory plays a key role in framing and conducting almost every aspect of the studyö (p. 11). This study primarily employed the cultural theory of grid and group. In fact, Douglasøs grid and group typology (1982, 1986) was originally used in cultural anthropology in order to understand the dynamics of culture and social changes (Schwarz & Thompson, 1990). This framework also serves in comprehending school culture and learning environments (Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005; Harris, 2005, 2015).

Mary Douglas (1982, 1986) offered a typology that helps educators meet conceptual and methodological challenges inherent in cultural inquiry and educational practice. According to Harris (2015), her typology of grid and group is useful, as it

- provides a matrix to classify school contexts,
- draws specific observations about individualsø values, beliefs, and behaviors,
- is designed to take into account the total social environment as well as the interrelationships among school members and their context, and
- explains how constructed contextual meanings are generated and transformed.

Grid Dimension

In Douglas's (1982, 1986) frame, grid refers to the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions such as role expectations, rules, and procedures. Grid can be plotted on a continuum from strong to weak. In strong- grid environments, teachers typically do not have the freedom to select their own curricula and textbooks, and many decisions are made at the upper levels of administration. The high end of the grid continuum is where individuals are controlled by rules and strict guidelines. Individuals located in the high grid portion of the continuum would not interact with other individuals and would operate under the strictest of requirements and obligations. Their individual behavior would be based only on what they perceived they were supposed to do for themselves; it would not include flexibility or experimentation (Douglas, 1982, 1986). The behavior of individuals in high grid is controlled by organizational rules (Harris, 1995).

At the weak- end of the grid continuum, teachers are given much more autonomy in choosing curricula, texts and methods. The lowest end of the grid continuum is where the individual is not encumbered or responsible to specific rules. Individuals in this area have more autonomy and higher degrees of personal freedom (Case, 2007; Stansberry, 2001). Figure 2 illustrates the characteristics of the grid continuum reflective of school culture.

Minimal autonomy

Specifically defined roles, rules, and responsibilities

Centralized power and authority

Maximum autonomy

Loosely defined roles, rules, and responsibilities

Decentralized power and authority

Strong

Grid

Weak

Grid

Figure 2. The Grid Dimension of School Culture. Harris, (2015)
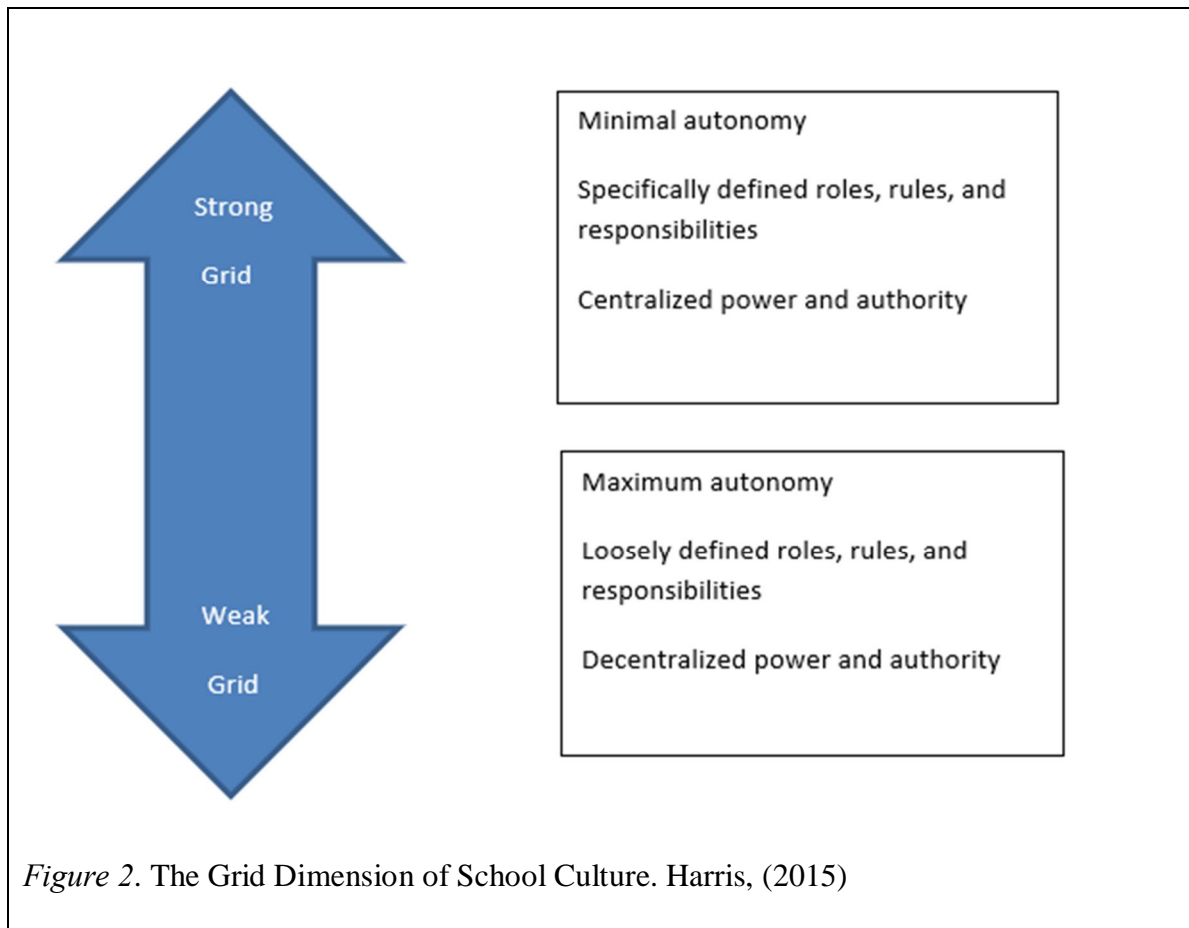
Group Dimension

The concept of õgroupö takes into account the holistic picture of the social unit in the culture under study. According to Harris (2015), õGroup represents the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unitö (p.40). The õgroup variable indicates individualsø interactions to expose the extent to which they are willing to devote effort and energy to creating or maintaining a group synergyö (Stansberry, 2001). Similar to grid, group has a continuum of strong to weak. In strong-group environments, specific membership criteria exist, and explicit pressures influence collective relationships. In weak-group environments, the pressure for group-focused activities and relationships is relatively low. As the group dimension moves toward the stronger end of the continuum, members are more accountable and responsible as role players in their group (Stansberry, 2001). Stronger groups are

more helpful to each other and more committed to working together to accomplish their goals. In extremely strong group relationships, the survival of the entire group and all of its members is critically important (Case, 2010; Douglas, 1982; Harris, 2005; Stansberry, 2001). Douglas (1982) distinguishes this by writing that õ the strongest effects of group are to be found where an environment incorporates a person with the rest by implicating them together in common residence, shared work, shared resources and recreation, and by inserting control over marriage and kinshipö (p.202). In this type of environment the school is the center of the town.

According to Case (2010), õIn weak-group, an individual may be aware of the group rules and expectations but makes no choice to fulfill those expectationsö (p. 52). Low or weak-group examples could include groups with short-term activities or commitments (Harris, 2015). A school culture with low-group would lack strong tradition or have fluctuating faculty or staff, or exist as an institution with few common goals (Harris, 2015). Figure 3 (Harris, 2015) illustrates the characteristics of the group continuum reflective of school culture.
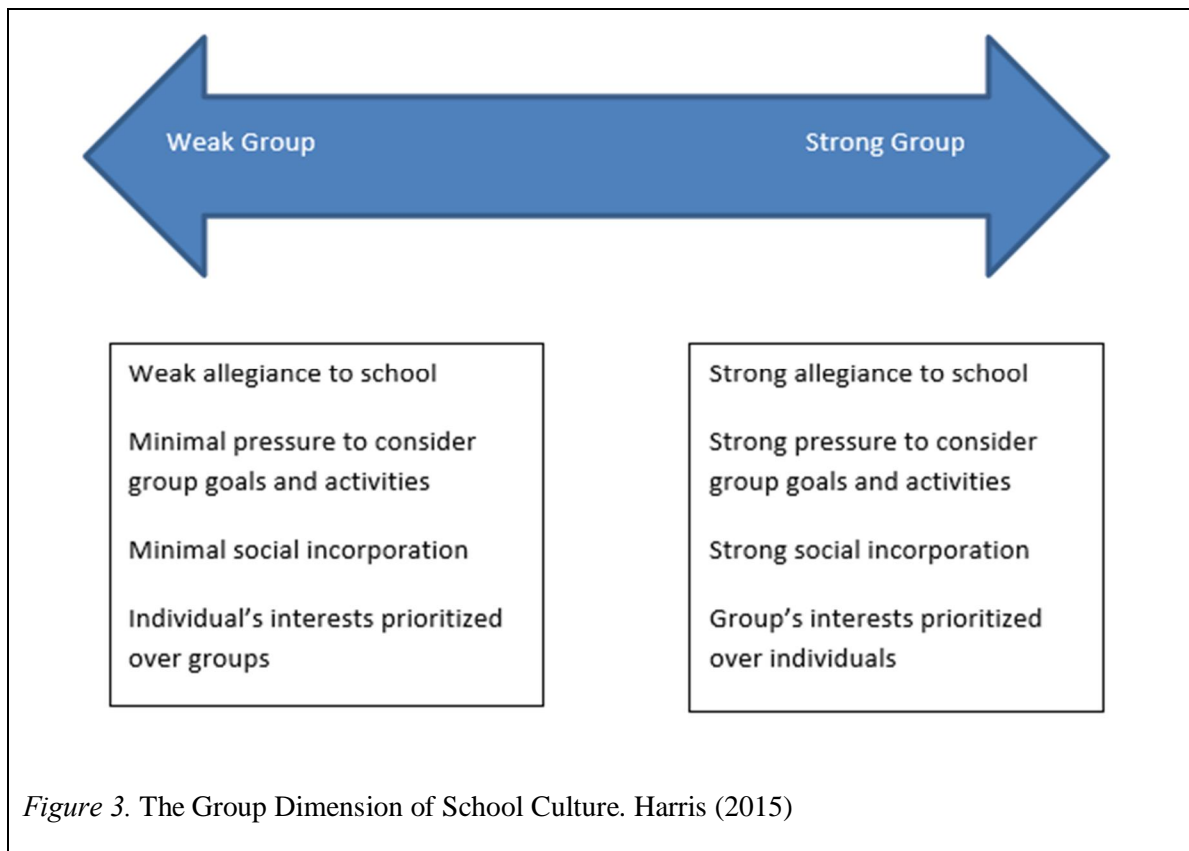
Figure 3. The Group Dimension of School Culture. Harris (2015)

A visualization of Mary Douglas's typology of grid and group is depicted in FIGURE 4 below. The description of each quadrant in the grid and group matrix is also detailed below (Case, 2010; Douglas, 1982, 1986; Harris, 2005, 2015; Stansberry, 2001).

Collectivist: The lower right quadrant, strong- group, weak- grid

- Individuals base their identity on their participation within the group.

- Individuals do compete for status, but their actions are strongly influenced by the group and performed to please the group.

- The continuance of group goals and tradition is critical and valued.

Corporate: The upper right quadrant, strong- group, strong- grid

- Individuals base their identity on their participation within the group.

- Individuals perceive support and encouragement from their group

- The hierarchy system is understood by the members of the group in that they know that their success also causes success of the group.

- The survival of the group and the maintenance of tradition are very important to all members of the group.

Bureaucratic: The upper left quadrant, high- grid, low- group

- The individual is very limited in personal decisions and activities

- Personal autonomy is minimal

- Individual behavior is based upon the assigned role and fulfilment of that role.

- Group survival and the influence of the group are minimal or non-existent

- Status is based on hierarchy classified by race, gender, family heritage, or ancestry

Individualist: The lower left quadrant, low- grid, low- group

- The individual is not constrained by the group, rules, or traditions.

- Status and rewards for the individual are competitive; the individual can accomplish great things or fail miserably without affecting the group

- Connection with or survival of the group is not important

As organizations or individuals are identified with particular quadrants or grid and group characteristics, extreme or outliers exist. The location of the greatest number of individuals within a particular quadrant of the matrix will identify the overall characteristics of the course culture being studied. Figure 4 (Harris, 2015) represents all four quadrants and identifies the major characteristics of each.

Figure 4. Grid and Group Typology, (Harris, 2015).
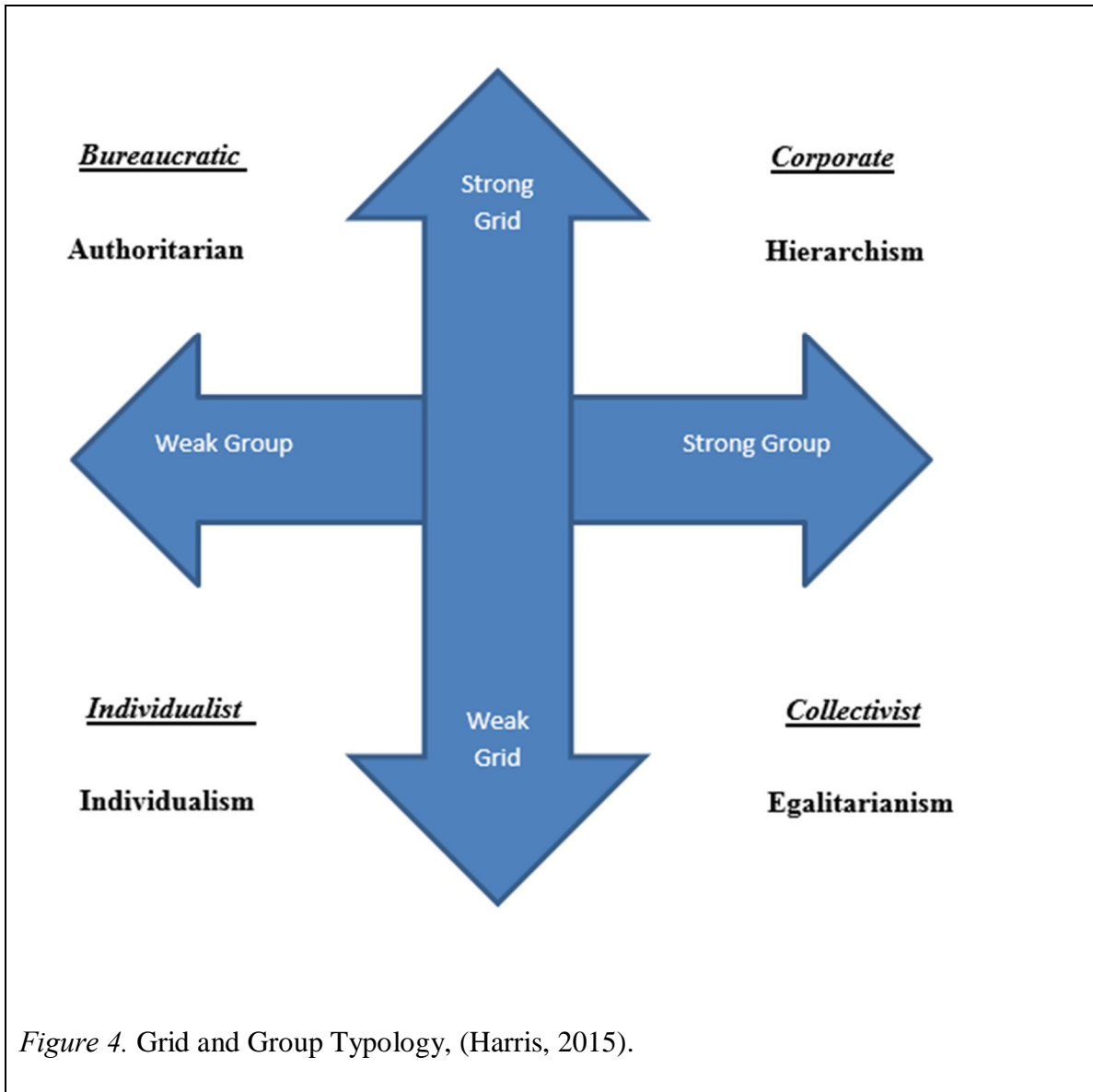
Mary Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory posited that four distinct ways of life—individualism, hierarchism, authoritarianism and egalitarianism— shape and are shaped by the grid and group dynamics of a given context (Harris, 2015). These cultural preferences are influenced by the consistent social interaction with other members of the group or culture. As Harris (2014) stated, "Consequently, cultural preferences have bearing on matters such as personal and group motivation, use and distribution of educational resources, collaboration and teamwork, justice and fairness, sharing risks and opportunities, as well as other dimensions of

educational practiceö (p. 32). As people recognize their cultural preferences and interact within their school environments, they learn to adapt and grow within the educational context.

People who align with the individualism profile, are naturally competitive, ambitious, and embrace lifeøs challenges. They also prefer freedom to accomplish tasks and are resistant to be bound by precedent, tradition, or group norms. Authoritarians are conscientious about completing their work and prefer working in a role-specific and predictable work atmosphere. They are motivated by dependable routines, clearly defined roles, and uniformed guidelines. Hierarchs value group procedures, lines of authority, and social stability. They also prefer clear rules, defined professional roles, group directed goals, activities, and awards. Hierarchs are loyal members of their organization. Egalitarians are sociable and cooperative and will change their opinion for the good of the group if needed. They also prefer a high-supportive/low-directive approach to supervision where subordinates have control over day-to-day decision making.

Harris (1995, 2005) concluded that the application of the Douglasøs (1982, 1986) grid and group typology was productive in placing school in one of four quadrants. This research was driven by the question, õIs it fruitful (grid/group model) for describing and analyzing educational settings?ö (Harris, 1995). Harris states, õThe model is fruitful. It portrays the interplay of two powerful cultural dimensions inherent in any educational setting. Of particular interest to educators would be the question does culture influence teaching and learning?ö (1995, pp.640).

Culture ultimately defines the essence of the school and gives meaning to human endeavor. It encompasses the entire educational process, specifically the values, beliefs, norms, and social patterns of all members of the school community. Moreover, the culture of an organization is interrelated with every facet of education, including organizational structure, motivation, leadership, decision making, communications, and change (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Douglasøs typology of grid and group brings order to experience and provides a common language to explain behaviors and interactions in a school setting. According to the typology, there is not an infinite number of possibilities that characterize cultural experience. Rather, as

outlined in this chapter, there are four and only four, distinctive school contexts in which one may find him or herself, and only two dimensions, grid and group, which define each of those four prototypes (Harris, 2015).

Douglas' Cultural Theory (1982, 1986) has been used in numerous educational settings to better understand and comprehend school cultures and learning environments. Specifically, the grid and group typology has been used in research studies focused on principals' and teachers' perceptions of school leader succession, successful superintendents' tenures, school cultures of traditional school environments and online educational settings. (Balenseifen, 2004; Case, 2010; Shellenberger, 1999; Stansberry, 2001)). For example, Balenseifen (2004) studied the characteristics of successful school superintendents that lead to longer than the national average superintendent tenure. In using Douglas' (1982, 1986) grid and group typology as a theoretical lens, factors such as power, authority, cultural bias, and role expectation factored in to the research findings. Balenseifen (2004) concluded many factors ultimately contributed to superintendents successful tenures; however, each school district he studied was identified in the collectivist low grid, high group culture. Additional themes about the superintendents' characteristics were also produced: recognition, relationship building, student centered, financial skills, politics, and experience. Shellenberger (1999) used Douglas' (1982, 1986) grid and group typology to study principals' and teachers' perceptions of leader succession and school culture in selected public schools. It was proposed that the understanding of school culture can be useful to administrators and teachers during the succession phase. By using Douglas' (1982, 1986) grid and group typology during the succession, behaviors of the participants became more predictable. Shellenberger (1999) concluded understanding the school culture, specifically Douglas' (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory, was beneficial when making changes within an educational environment. Case (2010) studied the school cultures of traditional school environments compared to online learning. In using Douglas' (1982) grid and group typology, Case (2010) identified distinctive

patterns of faculty and student engagement, communication and community that occur within various online courses. Case (2010) concluded,

> Online culture should not be characterized as good or bad; instead, characterizing online courses as effective or not effective in promoting community would be a better, more specific description. Classifying online courses according to their cultures represented by the grid and group typology will make it possible for future course designers and instructors to explain characteristics of courses they have taught, and it will make it possible for course designers and instructors to identify strengths of other grid and group characteristics and re-design courses to promote the development of those characteristics. (p. 198)

As Harris (2015) stated, Douglas's (1982, 1986) typology of grid and group is useful in educational environments, as it

- provides a matrix to classify school contexts,
- draws specific observations about individuals' values, beliefs, and behaviors,
- is designed to take into account the total social environment as well as the interrelationships among school members and their context, and
- explains how constructed contextual meanings are generated and transformed.

Professional learning communities are comprised of teachers and principals with specific roles that may promote or inhibit the success of the PLCs. Cultural theory (Douglas, 1982, 1986) will provide a framework to better understand the social environments of PLCs and the interrelationships among school members.

Summary

This chapter has reviewed literature that involves (a) professional learning communities, (b) challenges within professional learning communities, and (c) Mary Douglas's (1982. 1986) Cultural Theory.

In an attempt to increase the collective efficacy of teachers, schools are using various

forms of professional learning communities (PLCs) in order to improve educational practices

through enhanced communication and collaboration among teachers. The professional learning

community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not

simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift, from a

focus on teaching to a focus on learning, has profound implications for schools (DuFour, 2004).

However, not all collaborative school environments have shown increase in the collective

efficacy of the classroom teachers and ultimately increased student academic achievement. Fullan

(2000) contended, one important barrier to implementing PLCs in schools lies in the failure to

consider the context at all three levels of the system- schools, districts, and provincial

departments of education. Fullan (2001, 2006) makes some valid points in identifying the many

stakeholders who must be õall inö during the process. When all of these stakeholders agree to this

reform, meaningful change can occur. Principal leadership behaviors have been shown to increase

the collective efficacy of classroom teachers in some instances. If we recognize the professional

learning community model has been shown to increase student academic achievement and

improve teacher self-efficacy, we must work to understand the culture of the schools in order to

become as effective as possible. Harris (2015) suggested that schools have a culture that is unique

and through using Mary Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory, we can gain an understanding

of the culture. Additional research is required in identifying what principal actions and cultural

symbols support or hinder the educational practices of professional learning communities. The

principal has a major role and involvement in shaping the goals and aspirations of the school. As

Glickman (2002) emphasized, the goal in all supervisory interactions is to use the approach that

strengthens õa teacherøs capacity for greater reflection and self-reliance in making improvements

in classroom teaching and learningö (p.44). Edgerson and Kritsonis (2006) elaborated on the

importance of principalsø leadership behaviors:

Principals have the ability to improve teacher perceptions overall by simply attending to

fundamental components inherent in quality relationships. As teachers begin to feel better

about themselves and what their collective missions are as a result of significant

interactions with their principals, they become more effective in the classroom. (p. 32)

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used to collect, analyze and code data for the study and explains basic features of naturalistic inquiry. This study was bound to two secondary schools and explored the professional learning community structures in the educational settings.

Statement of the Problem

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are powerful models designed to promote system-wide school improvement. While PLCs are designed to promote system-wide school improvement, research indicated that these goals are accomplished in some instances (DuFour et al., 2005; Saphier, 2005; Schmoker, 2005), and not accomplished in others (Carroll, 2010; Chenowith, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Sims & Penny, 2015; Supovitz & Christman, 2003; Talbert, 2011). One way to explain these discrepancies is through cultural theory, which posits that cultural membersøroles and the rules associated with these roles are important variables in contextual practices and interactions (Douglas, 1995; Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005; Harris, 2005). For example, teachersø and principalsøroles may inhibit or promote the success of PLCs in a given school environment (Fullan, 2006; Hord, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was through cultural theory, to explore principalsø and teachersøroles in professional learning communities in two selected school contexts.

Research Questions

1. In each school studied, how is the professional learning community structured?

    a. What are the teachersø roles in the PLC?

    b. What is the principaløs role in the PLC?

2. How do principal and teacher roles in the PLC interrelate with cultures of each school?

3. How does Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory explain the above?

Research Design

This study used naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson et al., 1993), which allows the researcher to understand the everyday life of the people involved in the professional learning community. This study featured interactions with human subjects and their perceptions of specific situations, processes, and occurrences. Analysis of these experiences and perceptions were completed to form a description of a specific situational phenomenon, or a case study. This study included the following methods of data collection: principal and teacher interviews, document and artifact analysis, and participant observations with the aim of corroborating emergent facts or phenomenon. Naturalistic inquiry was chosen to provide this holistic picture of what the impact was on the lives of the teachers, school culture, and the principal, within the school setting.

Methodological Procedures

Participant Selection

The study population consisted of school faculty and school administrators from two middle schools located in a large southwestern state. All study population participants had received professional development and training for the successful implementation of the professional learning community model. The middle schools selected for this study have practiced the professional learning community model for over 15 years and receive extensive professional training each year for school-wide sustainability. Both school sites have demonstrated school-wide academic progress. The purposive sample for observations and

interviews consisted of professional learning community members. Merriam (1998) explained that purposive sampling õis based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learnedö (p. 61). The interview sample for the study consisted of one department chair/leader, one school administrator, and two general education teachers within the educational environment. Each interview participant will hold a defined role within the educational environment and professional learning community. Core subject PLC meetings will be observed for this study.

Data Collection

Within the natural setting, I collected data through observations and interviews (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Observations. During the data collection process, observations were conducted on a formal and informal basis. As Erlandson et al. (1993) stated, õObservation allows the researcher to discover the here- and -now innerworkings of the environment via the use of the five human sensesö (p. 94). As the researcher, I took an observer-participant role throughout my observations. PLC members knew my reason for being in attendance; however, I observed the dynamics of membersøinteractions and the roles within the group members and had minimal personal participation within the meetings. Observational data were collected during multiple visits to school sites. I attended and observed core subject (i.e., English, Math, Social Studies, and Science) professional learning community meetings. Observational data were recorded through detailed field notes. I was purposeful in making note of the meeting environment. How are the members interacting with one another? What is the seating configuration for the members of the meeting? Is there an agenda for the meeting? Does each member of the meeting have a specific role during the meeting? Is there a leader or facilitator of the meeting? What is the main topic and discussion points of the meeting? Who is in attendance at the meeting? What are the physical cues and/or body language of each member?

The field notes taken during and immediately following observations were analyzed along with interview transcripts. As Erlandson et al. (1993) stated,

Interviews are, no doubt, significant in naturalistic inquiry. However, most adults have lost much of the natural ability to learn by careful and intuitive observation. Much is to be gained by looking, listening, feeling, and smelling rather than by merely talking. Many fine and important details have become obscured in the day-to óday activities of life. The development and refinement of the underestimated art of observation should be a primary emphasis in the practice of naturalistic research. (p. 98)

Interviews. The interview sample consisted of four participants from each suburban school who met the criteria outlined in the subsection. The specific sample for interviews consisted of one department/team leader, one beginning teacher, one veteran teacher and one school administrator within the educational environment. Beginning teachers will be represented by a teacher in their first three years of teaching. Each member of the sample group had different roles and educational experiences within the professional learning community.

Principal and teacher interviews were completed at the school site during an available and convenient time for the research study participant. This occurred during the school day or after school hours. Interviews consisted of six questions for teachers and six questions for principals, as well as follow up questions throughout the interview. All interviews were face- to face and completed at the school site. These interviews were completed in the participantøs classroom and/or office or the school conference room. Teacher interview questions consisted of the following:

- Describe your school environment.
- Briefly describe a typical professional learning community meeting.
- Describe your principaløs role in the professional learning community?
- What is your role in the professional learning community?

- What kind of PLC activities does your principal participate in?

- How does your school principal support a professional learning community?

Principal interview questions consisted of the following:

- Describe your school environment.

- Briefly describe a typical professional learning community meeting.

- Describe your role in the professional learning community?

- What is the teachersø roles in the professional learning community?

- What kinds of PLC activities do you participate in?

- How do you support and cultivate the professional learning community?

Data Analysis

With this study using naturalistic inquiry, the analysis of data was an interactive process throughout the data collection period. As Erlandson et al. (1993) stated,

> An assumption of the naturalistic researcher is that the human instrument is capable of ongoing fine tuning in order to generate the most fertile array of data. One effect of this continuous adjustment process is that as data are garnered, they are immediately analyzed. (p.114)

The researcher separated, sorted and structured the data into categories with meaning and congruency. All interview responses were coded into grid and group segments according to Douglasø (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory.

Organize, prepare, and read data. All interviews were transcribed, field notes from observations were optically scanned, analyzed and plotted in Douglasø grid and group typology. All data were categorized and sorted depending on the sources of information. Data were read and the process of reflecting on general meaning commenced.

Code data. Data were organized and text were labeled. Three main types of coding were used for this process: In Vivo Coding, Descriptive Coding; and Values Coding (Saldana, 2016).

The process of In Vivo Coding uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes. This may include folk or indigenous terms of a particular culture, subculture, or micro-culture to suggest the existence of the group's cultural categories. Descriptive Coding assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase, the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data. Values Coding uses the application of codes to qualitative data that reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspective or worldview (Saldana, 2016).

Generate themes or categories. Coded data were reviewed and major findings were identified and placed in numerous categories. Themes and descriptions of the school culture and professional learning community were outlined by the researcher. Application of Douglas's typology and the exploration of the model's utility and grid/group classifications were *a posteriori* consideration. I compared and contrasted features of each PLC and school context with Douglas's grid and group criteria. For grid assessment, considerations included: "Is the individual autonomy constrained by explicitly defined rules and role expectations (i.e., a strong 'grid' consideration), or is individual autonomy unconstrained due to the lack of rules or roles (i.e., a low-grid consideration)? Are role and reward assigned according to a person's social status, race, or gender (strong-grid), or are they achieved according to equitable assessment criteria (weak-grid)?" Group considerations will include the following: "Is group survival important (strong-group) or unimportant (weak-group). Are cultural norms and rituals collective and group centered (strong-group), or are they personal (weak-group)?" This strategy allowed me to place a school environment and PLC group along the grid and group continuums and categorize each in a particular grid/group cell (Douglas, 1982, 1986; Harris, 2005).

Convey findings and interpret meanings. This is a naturalistic study. Therefore, data were presented in a narrative passage to convey the findings of the analysis. This narrative passage outlined the identified themes, subthemes, and multiple perspectives from participants.

The researcher attached personal interpretations to the findings and compared findings to previous research studies.

Researchers Role

Researcher Bias

After completing my student teaching in the fall of 1998, I was fortunate to secure a full-time position at a middle school teaching World Cultures. During my two years in the middle school, I experienced a collaborative school culture. This was in the form of daily grade-level team meetings. This afforded me the opportunity to discuss any questions and/or concerns I may have had during my first few years of teaching. As I transitioned to my next teaching position, I found myself in a high school environment and continued with department meetings and other collaborative meetings. This was the first time I was introduced to the professional learning community (PLC) model.

I learned there was a specific model and framework for a PLC. As I transitioned to an administrative role, I had the opportunity to gain professional development for the overall implementation of the PLC model and began facilitating PLC meetings within certain departments I was supervising. With over 20 years in education, 12 involved as a school administrator, my own interest and attention has brought about the desire to ensure every professional learning community is highly effective in its implementation and sustainability. I am aware of my pre-conceived notions regarding the role of school culture, specifically the principal and teacher roles in supporting or inhibiting a collaborative school culture. I believe the sustainability of an effective professional learning community involves principals and teachers trusting the collaborative process and embracing the challenges within PLCs. I believe the rise or fall of the professional community concept depends on the collective capacity, commitment, and persistence of the educators in a given school context.

Ethical Considerations

In order to ensure trustworthiness and credibility, ethical considerations were employed regarding data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation.

Data collection ethics. Multiple ethical considerations must be addressed in qualitative research regarding data collection. Patton (2002) and Creswell (2009) identified several different considerations of importance to this study: (1) informed consent and confidentiality, (2) IRB approval, (3) gaining access to sites, (4) limiting disruptions at the research site, (5) mutual benefits among researcher and participants, (6) sensitive nature of data collected, and (7) interview protocol. Each of these considerations is discussed in further detail.

Initially, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained from the university. The IRB received a detailed outline of the proposed research study, identifying who was involved and how the participants were involved in the research. Next, a letter was sent to the school assistant superintendent and school site principals explaining the research study and assuring them of IRB approval for such study and to request permission to conduct the research within their school.

Once permission was gained from school administration, potential participants were contacted by their electronic school mail address to identify their willingness to participate in the study. To identify these participants, a link was sent via email, to all core teachers in the middle schools to query the faculty and identify participants who met the set criteria of beginning teachers, veteran teachers and department chairs. All email addresses were accessed from the schooløs website. An outline of the research topic was sent and an explanation of the process of data collection. Electronic mailings were delivered once per week for three consecutive weeks. Once they had agreed to participate, interviews and other meetings were scheduled around their teaching schedule. An informed consent form was created for selected participants to sign, with the acknowledgement that their rights would be protected throughout the research process. The selected participants were department chairs/leaders, head principals, veteran teachers and

beginning teachers in each middle school. To ensure confidentiality within the study, pseudonyms were used for all participants of the study. All transcriptions, notes, documents and other data were secured in a locked cabinet at my personal residence or in my possession.

Trustworthiness of Findings

Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended four criteria for establishing trustworthiness of findings in qualitative case studies to include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these criteria will be incorporated throughout the study.

Credibility

For credibility, techniques recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), were used in this study. All techniques are described in Table 1.

Transferability

For transferability, a õthick descriptionö was included, which is a technique first introduced by Ryle (1949) and later elaborated by Geertz (1973). The researcher thoroughly described the setting, context, participants, research design and results so the reader can best determine if this research study is relevant to their setting and situation.

Dependability and Confirmability

As Richardson (2014) stated**, "**Dependability refers to the ability of the study to be replicated or repeated, and confirmability refers to the degree to which my findings would be consistent with another personøs interpretation of the findingsö (p. 48). To meet dependability and confirmability requirements, all documents, notes, transcripts, recorded interviews, and observations are readily available for an audit. I continue to be fully transparent in my approach to research and believe someone else conducting the same research study would receive consistent and dependable results.

Table 1

Trustworthiness Criteria and Examples

Credibility		
Criteria/ Technique	*Result*	*Examples*
Prolonged Engagement	• Build trust • Develop rapport • Build relationships • Obtain accurate data	In the field from November 2019 to December 2019. Time spent in middle school settings.
Persistent Observation	• Obtain in-depth data • Obtain accurate data	Observation of participants in school PLC meetings.
Triangulation	• Verify data	Multiple sources of data; interviews, observations, websites and email.
Peer debriefing	• Additional perspective and guidance from a trusted source	Gathered feedback from doctoral candidates on interview questions
Member checking	• Verify documentation and conclusions	Participants were asked to verify accuracy of conclusions
Purposive sampling	• Site selection provided good venue to observe PLC meetings and school cultures.	Purposeful in the selection of participants for observations and interviews
Dependability/Confirmability		
Criteria	*Result*	*Examples*
Thick Description	• Provide a data base of thick description established by the details collected and analyzed from multiple interviews and observations	Outline for PLC meetings and observations regarding the role of educators within PLC meetings. Descriptions of roles and perspectives from participants.

Audit Trail	• Establish an audit trail by keeping detailed calendar of interviews and PLC meetings.	Detailed notes of teacher and principal interviews and observations are readily available for an audit.

Summary

Chapter III provides an in depth review of the methodology used throughout the study. This study was bound to two secondary schools located in a large city in a southwestern state and explored the PLC structure in an educational setting. Site principals and a representative sample of school teachers from different subject areas were used in this study. The naturalistic inquiry method was chosen to provide this holistic picture of what the impact was on the lives of the teachers, school culture, and the principal, within the school setting. Harris (2015) suggested that schools have a culture that is unique and through using Mary Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory, we can gain an understanding of the cultural members' roles and the rules associated with those roles in contextual practices and interactions. (Douglas, 1995; Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005; Harris, 2005). For example, teachers' and principals' roles may inhibit or promote the success of PLCs in a given school environment. (Fullan, 2006; Hord, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

Chapter IV presents the data that the participants voiced through interviews and researcher observations. Chapter V analyzes the data through the grid and group typology of culture. Chapter VI concludes the study with interpretations and recommendations for future research in supporting the educational practices of professional learning communities.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

The purpose of this case study was through cultural theory, to explore principals' and teachers' roles in professional learning communities in two selected school contexts. The theoretical framework was Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory. The study was guided by the following research questions.

1. In each school studied, how is the professional learning community structured?

   a. What are the teachers' roles in the PLC?

   b. What is the principal's role in the PLC?

2. How do principal and teacher roles in the PLC interrelate with cultures of each school?

3. How does Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory explain the above?

Reporting

Two middle schools were selected to participate in this study. Each middle school selected had practiced the professional learning community (PLC) model for over 15 years and received extensive professional training each year for school-wide sustainability. Both middle schools qualified for and received Title I funding. Each school site had demonstrated school-wide academic progress throughout the PLC implementation. Within each school context, interviews were conducted with the site principals and three teachers within the professional learning community. Specifically, a department chair, a veteran teacher and a beginning teacher were interviewed in each school.

Additional information was obtained by observing core subject (i.e. Math, Science, Language Arts, and Social Studies) professional learning community meetings, and the interactions among all PLC members.

Collected data were coded, analyzed, and categorized into themes. To identify the culture in which each professional learning community operates, I reported a detailed description of each middle school and each professional learning community's characteristics. These detailed descriptions are intended to enhance the reader's understanding, the cultural context of each school and provide a thick description (Merriam, 1988). Pseudonyms have been given to all participants, the school district, and the individual middle schools. The school district, middle schools, and all participants were guaranteed anonymity.

Selection of these two school environments was also based on the leadership dynamic for each school context. Though both school sites had implemented the professional learning community model for a number of years, each school context consisted of a different leadership dynamic. Blue Sky was in their first year with a new school principal and administrative team. This included assistant principals and the instructional coach. Conversely, Calvary's administrative team was a veteran group. Ms. Williams, the school principal, was in her seventh year at Calvary and her assistant principals were well versed in the professional learning community framework

District Context of Sandstone Public Schools

Sandstone is the fifth largest school district in a Midwestern state and employs 10,000 teachers and faculty members. The community served by Sandstone is a lower-socioeconomic area of the city, resulting in each site being eligible for Title I federal funds. Two middle schools located in the Sandstone Public School District, Blue Sky Middle School and Calvary Middle School, were identified for this study.

Sandstone Public Schools has a long tradition of educational excellence. In early 1914, parents consolidated four one-room country schools, and started Sandstone Public Schools. Since 1914, the district has continued to grow and currently is the fifth largest district in the state, covering 43 miles and educating over 19,000 students. Today, the district is located in a large metropolitan city and employees over 1400 certified staff members in 18 elementary schools, five middle schools, and three high schools. Many changes to the Sandstone community have occurred since 1914. In the past 20 years, Sandstone has experienced a decline in the median household income. This significant change in the socio-economic and socio-ethnic status of the community has created additional challenges for the school district. According to Coley and Baker (2013), the achievement gap between low-socioeconomic and more affluent students is twice as large as the achievement gap between African- American and Caucasian students.

Sandstone Mission and Vision

As Sandstone assessed the community changes and challenges, district leaders continued to focus on the mission for their student population, "To prepare all students to be self- navigating critical thinkers for life" (Sandstone Website, 2019). District leadership created goals that would drive all day to day decisions that focused on student achievement, high-performing collaborative teams, efficient operations, safe learning and working environments and sustained community engagement. The district continues to communicate this message to their teachers, students, parents, and community members. According to Sandstone's Website (2019), they purport to value educating and supporting the whole child, each child's ability to succeed, building positive relationships, a collaborative culture, continuous professional development and growth, student centered and data-driven decisions, teachers as the pivotal element in student success, and integrity, transparency, and accountability. As district leadership assessed their students' academic achievement, district initiatives were agreed upon to assist teachers and administrators in accomplishing the school district's mission of preparing students to be self- navigating, critical thinkers for life.

District Initiatives

Sandstone recognized the need to support their teachers and administrators as the student and community demographic changed. As district leadership researched evidence-based reforms, they identified the professional learning community (PLC) model had shown to be effective for many school environments with similar socio-economic communities. District leaders also discussed the importance of attracting and retaining quality teachers in the classroom, which was the impetus for the district's New Teacher Academy, which equips first year teachers with the training and support for their sustained success in the district. Sandstone Public Schools determined a comprehensive plan was needed to implement the district-wide initiatives and worked with site leaders to formulate a plan for the district.

Professional learning communities. Sandstone administration began researching the benefits of the professional learning community framework and developed a district-wide implementation plan. The first step was to provide professional development and training for leaders within the school district. District and site level administrators were sent to national conferences and trainings to learn the PLC framework and how to implement the model throughout the school district. The second step in the implementation plan was to send site administrators with groups of teacher leaders to PLC training. Sandstone continues to share the benefits of a collaborative school culture with principals, teachers, and community members.

New Teacher Academy. Sandstone also created a district-wide program to assist new teachers within the school district. The New Teacher Academy begins with a four-day training prior to the first day of school. Subjects reviewed consist of technology training, the professional learning community framework, the district's Response to Intervention model, and classroom management strategies. Central office employees also discuss topics including payroll procedures, insurance details, student information system procedures, and Sandstone's purchasing procedures.

New teachers spend time at their school site, meeting with site administrators, curriculum coordinators, instructional coaches, mentor teachers, and other team members. This was a time for new teachers to become acclimated to the district and their specific school environment. As the school year progressed, Sandstone continued to provide support and resources to new teachers with monthly and quarterly meetings. New teachers to the district also have weekly meetings with their site administrator and instructional coach to answer any questions the teacher may have and also provide support throughout the school year. New teachers are given an overview of the PLC framework and informed of their roles within the professional learning community. As one teacher stated, õI feel supported as a new teacher to the district. The New Teacher Academy was extremely informative and beneficial (Amy, interview, December 12, 2019).

<div align="center">

Blue Sky Middle School

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The purpose of this section was to introduce the participants involved in the study and describe Blue Skyøs history and mission. A description of the overall structure of professional learning community meetings and principal and teachersø roles within the PLC meetings were included in this section.

Participant Profiles

At Blue Sky Middle School, I interviewed one administrator and three teachers. Two teachers were veteran teachers, Johnathon and Victoria, and one teacher, James, was a beginning teacher. The administrator interviewed, Mr. Jones, was the head principal at Blue Sky.

Mr. Jones. Mr. Jones was a very enthusiastic and positive middle school principal. In describing the middle school atmosphere, he explained, õI think itøs great! I think we have a very positive environment. One thing I have been blessed with as a principal coming in, is that Iøve been very lucky to have a very solid staffö (Jones, interview, December 19, 2019). Mr. Jones was in his first year as principal of Blue Sky Middle School and recognized the challenges at the school, including low socio-economic student population, chronic absenteeism with students and staff members, and teacher retention. In spite of those challenges, Mr. Jones was focused on

creating a collaborative culture with his faculty and school community to ensure his students were making progress:

> I put out a survey to the staff about a month ago and we received some very positive feedback. It was just about five or six questions. Do you feel safe here? Do you feel like coming to work? Do you feel the administration listens to you? And a very high percentage of teachers and staff either agreed or highly agreed with the questions. (Jones, interview, December 19, 2019)

Johnathon. Johnathon was in his sixth year at Blue Sky and the department chair of social studies. Johnathon had coached numerous sports throughout his teaching career. Currently on the football staff, Johnathon works to balance the challenges of teaching and coaching within public schools. Though Blue Sky had experienced recent administrative changes, Johnathon was optimistic of the new administration moving the building in the right direction and cultivating a school culture that is more collaborative and collegial:

> We had a principal that was here [Blue Sky] my first few years and he built a strong PLC culture. You see the banner when you walk into the building, *PLC Model School.* When he left, they brought somebody else in who I don't think was prepared for the challenges that this building has. So we had two years, where we really slid back and lost a lot of people. And now we have a brand new administrative team in the building. But I think he's trying to build that back up...A supportive school culture. (Johnathon, interview, December 5, 2019)

Victoria. After initially not wanting to follow her mother's career path of being a teacher, Victoria embraced her calling to teach and had spent the past 10 years in public education and the last five teaching English at Blue Sky. In her first teaching position she realized, "This is a call on my life." She stated, "Blue Sky is a special place. I actually came here after being in a different school district and I think Sandstone is a special place too. I really love how they're appreciative you're here... happy you're here" (Victoria, interview, December 5, 2019).

James. James was in his third year at Blue Sky and seemed eager to share his perspective on PLCs and Blue Sky's culture. James was in his early thirties and did not travel the traditional teaching certification path. After graduating college, he knew he wanted to teach so he worked as a substitute teacher and completed the requirements for an alternative teaching certificate. When asked to describe the school culture at Blue Sky, he stated,

> Blue Sky has a very diverse, really diverse student body. Socio-economic background is all over the place. But we are a Title I school. Every year has been different here, for sure. But I think where we are right now with our new principal, he's taken a lot of interest in our school culture… In school pride with our students. (James, interview, December 12, 2019)

Blue Sky Middle School History and Mission

Blue Sky Middle School opened in 1993 and was the newest middle school in the Sandstone School District. When Blue Sky opened, the school was located in a new and developing neighborhood. Many young families moved into the area to attend Blue Sky. With the community's growth, Blue Sky experienced high academic achievement, athletic team success, and strong parental support and participation. For many years, Blue Sky was the second largest middle school in the school district. As the years had passed, Blue Sky had experienced a number of changes throughout their community. As the neighborhood and families matured, the school environment changed as well. Neighborhood school –aged students were replaced with students being bussed in from outside neighborhoods. Student enrollment declined, lower socio-economic families moved in to the area, resulting in new challenges for school administration and teachers.

The following demographic information was obtained by the state department of education's 2018-2019 accountability report. Blue Sky's fall enrollment consisted of 634 students in grades six through eight. Blue Sky identified 25% of their student population as Caucasian, 43% Black, 6% Asian, 14% Hispanic, over 1% Native American and nearly 10% of their population were identified with two or more races. Blue Sky also identified over 2% of their

students as English Language Learners (ELL) and 16% of the student population received Special Education Services. Also, 75% of the student population qualified for free and/or reduced child nutrition program which includes breakfast and lunch.

Although Blue Sky has experienced changes to their school community, the principal and staff continue to work toward the mission of educating all of their students and equipping them with the skills to be successful as they transition to high school. A common theme that was evident at Blue Sky was the importance of building the relational capacity with students in the school environment. James stated, õAcademics are valued here [Blue Sky] and I feel very encouraged and supported as a professional. We also have a lot of people here that truly, truly care about kidsö (Interview, December 12, 2019).

School Setting

Blue Sky Middle School was a visually appealing building. On my initial visit to Blue Sky, I immediately noticed the well-groomed exterior grounds and the large, mostly unoccupied parking lot. With the recent decline in student enrollment, the school district has reduced the work force at Blue Sky, resulting in plenty of parking for community members. According to James,

> During my three years at Blue Sky, we lost one of our feeder elementary schools and our
> enrollment declined for a while. With new housing in the area, our enrollment seems to
> be increasing. This year, sixth grade enrollment is our biggest class and we continue to
> get new students. (Interview, December 12, 2019.)

As I exited my vehicle, I entered the building and read a sign directing me to ring a bell for access to the main office. Sandstone secured entry procedures at every school site throughout the district a number of years ago.

During my data collection, this school environment was in the process of transitioning to new administrative leadership. The school principal, Mr. Jones and two assistant principals, were new to this school. Blue Sky was also dealing with considerable teacher turn over from the

previous year, which ultimately increased the number of new personnel within the learning environment. In speaking with Mr. Jones, Blue Sky's principal, he informed me Blue Sky is a neighborhood school. According to Mr. Jones,

> The neighborhood that surrounds this school, there is a very low percentage of the kids that live in the neighborhood surrounding the school versus the kids that are bussed into this school, and I think a lot of that is just families that live in the neighborhood, their kids have grown up, they're older families that live in the neighborhood now. (Interview, December, 19, 2019)

This community transition had resulted in a decline in student enrollment and Blue Sky had the lowest enrollment of the five middle schools located in Sandstone. The socio-economic status of the community and parental participation have declined in recent years. As Victoria stated, "Our kids come from hard places. We want to see them get to college or make it out of their cycle of poverty in which some of them find themselves" (Victoria, interview, December 5, 2019).

Blue Sky had also experienced an increase in teacher and administrator turn over within the last five to seven years. Within the last six years, Blue Sky had three different school principals and five different instructional coaches. In speaking with Johnathon, a veteran history teacher at Blue Sky, he shared his experience with the recent administrator and teacher turn over:

> So there's been a lot of building turnover in staff. From last year to this year, there's only four people in my hallway alone that are left from last year. And the same story could be told up and down a lot of the team core hallways. So, since I've been here six years, I've had five different PLC partners. (Interview, December 7, 2019)

School Structure

In the 1980's, an educational concept was introduced to respond to the developmental needs of young teens. This reform considered hallmarks of the middle school concept (Alexander & George, 1981). Schools mainly focus on three practices at the core of middle school ideology: (1) interdisciplinary team teaching, (2) flexible scheduling, and (3) advisory programs.

Blue Sky, from its inception, implemented the middle school concept. The building had three main hallways, each identified for a specific grade level. Each grade level has two teams and two teachers for each core subject (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies). As Mr. Jones stated,

> We meet in PLCs on Tuesday and Thursdays. Teachers have a day where they meet as a duo because each grade level has two teams, an A Team and a C Team. So, they will meet as a pair on Tuesday or Thursday and then meet as a grade level the other day. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

Blue Sky had one lead principal, one assistant principal, and one administrative intern. Blue Sky also employed an instructional coach, who worked with each professional learning community member. Core subject teachers had daily common planning time, which enabled teachers to meet and collaborate consistently. Blue Sky's teachers met in interdisciplinary teams and discuss curriculum, assessments, interventions and enrichment opportunities for all students within the grade level. Blue Sky's administration had created a flexible teaching schedule to allow teachers the opportunity to collaborate professionally throughout the school day. Blue Sky also provided a student advisory time within the school day for teachers and students. As Johnathon commented, "We also have an advisory time for the students, so teachers can touch base with any students struggling" (Interview, December 5, 2019). This was an opportunity for students to receive additional academic support and advisement from the teaching staff.

Professional Learning Communities

In the entrance of the middle school, a large banner hung from the ceiling recognizing Blue Sky as a model "Professional Learning Community School" and was a great sense of pride for administration, faculty, students, parents, and the school community. Blue Sky scheduled PLC meetings twice a week, one meeting as a grade level and one subject meeting. PLC meetings were opportunities for teachers to discuss curriculum and teaching strategies. It was the expectation at Blue Sky that teachers teach the same topics and create common formative assessments. The

purpose of common formative assessments was for teachers to be able to discuss their teaching strengths and weaknesses. This collaborative culture was reinforced and modeled by site administration. Blue Sky had experienced major teacher and principal turnover within the last five years. The entire administrative team was new to the building and many core subject area teachers were new to the building as well.

For this study, I observed four PLC meetings within Blue Sky Middle School. These observations were chronicled to examine the roles of the principal and teachers within this school context. A description of each PLC meeting is reported in the narrative below.

Eighth grade English PLC. As I entered the school office, I informed the administrative assistant I was there to observe the English PLC scheduled to begin at 7:45am. After signing in, I made my way to the PLC meeting. As I walked down the hall, I was greeted by the school principal, Mr. Jones. He welcomed me to their school environment and directed me toward the appropriate hallway. Once I arrived at the classroom, I was greeted at the door by an English teacher, who introduced herself and welcomed me to the meeting. I thanked her for allowing me to attend the meeting and located a desk in the back of the room to sit and observe. A few minutes later, a second female teacher entered the classroom. I later discovered she was the department chair and had been in the building for seven years.

Victoria and her PLC partner seemed very comfortable with one another and began discussing curriculum standards, student assessments, and student achievement. As Victoria stated, õWe look at unit assessments and the CFAs. We also discuss what remediation stations we like and how we are going to schedule them for our studentsö (Interview, December 9, 2019). A third teacher arrived and joined the conversation. This teacher was the resource teacher for the grade level. Discussions focused on student skill development and student mastery, specifically the tool used for student feedback and student self-assessment. The department chair began reviewing the weekly lesson plans for the grade level. All three teachers attended professional learning community conferences and training throughout their school tenure. Within a few

minutes, I was informed the PLC meeting would involve meeting with the entire grade level to discuss an upcoming grade-level wide assessment. We relocated to a classroom down the hall and listened to the school counselor explain the process for the upcoming testing. Most teachers were engaged listening throughout the meeting, with an occasional question regarding the testing format. Questions were asked about special education students and specifically, if testing accommodations were allowed for this assessment. As I observed the interactions between the teachers and counselors, I noticed a wall poster titled, õAcademic Essentials.ö The poster outlined three areas of focus for the teachers in this specific learning environment, *Relationships, Professional Learning Communities, and Marzano's Framework*. I noticed this same poster located in the hallway as well.

Throughout the PLC meeting, a principal or assistant principal was not in attendance. According to Victoria, õThey [administrators] get really busy and not necessarily can be in their [PLC meetings] (Interview, December 9, 2019). Both English teachers were veteran teachers within the school environment and seemed comfortable with the PLC framework. At the end of the scheduled PLC meeting, I noticed both teachers continued their discussion and students were not entering the classroom. After inquiring about this development, I discovered all teachers had their negotiated planning time scheduled immediately after their PLC meeting and would occasionally use this additional time to stay engaged in their conversations. Both teachers displayed an enthusiasm for the curriculum and lesson planning.

Eighth grade science PLC. After signing in with the office, I was informed teachers were meeting in subject area PLC groups for this particular day. I made my way to the science room and found two male teachers engaged in conversation. I reminded them I was in attendance to observe their PLC meeting, and proceeded to find a desk in the back of the room. The two teachers were discussing an upcoming exam they were planning for their classes. One teacher was seated at his desk and the other was seated on top of a student desk. Both teachers were new to the building and new to the profession. Both teachers had less than two years of experience in

the building and with the professional learning community framework. According to Johnathon, õWith our high staff turnover each year, itøs every year that youøre dealing with a new PLC partnerö (Interview, December 5, 2019).

The meeting was less formal than other PLC meetings I had observed in the building; however, the topic of their conversation was focused on their curriculum and student assessments: õDo you agree we should prepare our students for the test this Friday? If not, we can wait until next weekö (Observation, December 5, 2019). As I observed the conversation, both teachers seemed comfortable with each other and receptive to each otherøs suggestions and ideas. After discussing and agreeing on daily lesson plans for the upcoming week, they concluded the meeting. The meeting lasted 20 minutes. There was not an administrator or instructional coach present during the meeting. Both teachers seemed conscientious and genuinely concerned with student progress. However, conversations regarding specific student assessment data and in-depth interventions/ remediation were not observed.

Eighth grade level PLC. As I entered the instructional coachøs classroom, I noticed a few teachers sitting at tables throughout the room. This PLC meeting was a grade level team meeting and I was informed the teachers were discussing the upcoming semester tests. At Blue Sky Middle School, grade level PLC meetings usually consist of the entire group disaggregating benchmark testing data together and also reviewing common formative assessments (CFAs) created by each subject area. Mr. Jones stated, õTeachers will disaggregate the unit. They will take the tests themselves. They will plan the unit backwards. They will create pacing guides. And as they go through each unit, they make sure everything is aligned to their assessmentsö (Interview, December 19, 2019). However, this did not occur during my observation. Subject benchmark assessments are created by the district curriculum coordinators and distributed throughout the school sites. As I sat down in the back of the room to observe the groupøs dynamic, I noticed a few groups beginning to finish their conversations and were preparing to leave. The head principal did enter the classroom after a few minutes. He quickly informed the

group he was leaving the building to attend a mandatory district meeting and would be gone from the building most of the school day: ōI apologize I have to leave for a meeting today and will be out of the building all day. Can I do anything for you before I leave? (Jones, observation, December 12, 2019). After the principal exited the classroom, the instructional coach asked if any teachers had questions regarding the upcoming assessments. Within a few moments, groups began to exit the classroom.

This PLC meeting lasted about 15 minutes. I did not observe a specific agenda or structured plan for this meeting. After observing the meeting, the two emerging themes consisted of a lack of structure throughout the meeting and a sense of isolation within the groups. As Johnathon stated,

> Itøs supposed to be a time we are looking at data reflectively. Where youøre supposed to have a principal in there with you. Asking questions regarding our CFAs, our instructional cycle and what are we doing for remediation. We havenøt been getting a lot of that intervention or pushing from our principals. (Interview, December 5, 2019)

Both teachers from each subject area were sitting together; however, collaboration with other subject area teachers did not occur. Also, as each individual group determined they had accomplished the task at hand, they removed themselves from the meeting.

Sixth grade level PLC. All grade level PLC meetings at Blue Sky were held in the instructional coachøs classroom and as I approached the classroom, I noticed the door was locked and the lights were turned off. I knew which grade level was scheduled to meet so I walked toward their hallway. As I walked down the hallway, a teacher asked if he could help me and I informed him I was looking for his PLC meeting. He was joined by additional teachers in the hall and they were all walking toward the instructional coachøs classroom.

Upon arriving at the door, a teacher opened the door with her key and the group entered the classroom: ōOur instructional coach is probably just running a little late. She may be helping in the officeö (Observation, December 12, 2019). I made my way to a back table to begin taking

notes of the PLC meeting. This classroom was configured with multiple round tables throughout the room and each group of teachers sat at separate tables. English teachers sat together, math teachers sat together, and so on. I witnessed the English teachers discussing a common formative assessment (CFA) they had given their students and they were looking at their students' results for the assessment. Sandstone has purchased a computer program, Mastery Connect, to provide teachers and administrators, student assessment data in real time. Teachers have the ability to upload their CFAs into Mastery Connect and review student achievement data by specific skill and question on the assessment. According to Victoria, õWe have Mastery Connect, which gives us assessment data on our students. Students are classified as green for advanced, yellow for basic knowledge, and red for kids below the basic levelö (Interview, December 9, 2019).

After a few minutes, the instructional coach entered the classroom. She apologized for her late arrival and informed the group she had been in the office covering for an administrator. She made her way around the room to check on each group. As each group worked through their data, they exited the room. The meeting was completely over within 30 minutes.

Site Leadership

Blue Sky Middle School had experienced major change within the administrative team the last four years. Blue Sky had three different principals in that time frame. This year, Blue Sky began the school year with all new administrators. Mr. Jones began his first year as a lead principal with a new assistant principal, a new administrative intern and a new instructional coach. In speaking with Blue Sky teachers, the change of site leadership had a positive effect on the overall school culture.

Principals' Role within Blue Sky PLCs. Each member of the administrative team at Blue Sky Middle School had a specific role within the PLC framework. Each member had an assigned core subject and was expected to meet with their group during the scheduled meetings. When Mr. Jones was asked to describe his role in the professional learning community, he stated, õAn administrator's role is to be a source of support. But it's not an administrator's role, for a

well-oiled PLC, to interfere that much. You function as a coach. You don't function as a micromanager" (Interview, December 19, 2019). As a first year principal, Mr. Jones recognized the challenges in sustaining an effective PLC and consistently worked with his administrative team to ensure teachers feet supported with the PLC framework:

> I make sure that my assistant principals are visiting those PLCs. I'm not going to lie. It gets busy. There are times where the day kind of takes a life of its own and we are unable to attend the meetings. What's really frustrating is substitute teachers cancelling at the last minute. This causes a teacher, it might be on a PLC day, to cover that hour or during their PLC time´ that messes up the PLCs. (Jones, interview, December 19, 2019)

In this school context, administrators worked with the instructional coach and teachers to align daily lesson plans with district curriculum pacing guides, create common formative assessments, and disaggregate student testing data. Mr. Jones stated,

> It's all about making sure that you are adapting to the students that you serve, you are adapting to your collecting data, you're collecting what works and what doesn't work, you're figuring out a way of adjusting it, you have those four questions. How do we instruct them? What do we do if they don't get it? What do we do if they do get it? How do we remediate and enrich? So the remediation and enrichment piece has always been a speedbump at every school that I've been. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

Familial Culture

As the Blue Sky principal, Mr. Jones worked to build a collaborative school culture that was conducive to his faculty's collective efficacy. As Mr. Jones stated,

> Why would you want to be in the classroom by yourself not sharing ideas? Not being willing to be collaborative or collegial with the rest of your folks that you're on a team with or with the rest of your building because I see this place as a family. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

According to James,

He [Mr. Jones] really tries to focus on the positive, remind us about what's important and

remind us about why we are here, which I haven't always seen with every principal. He

has made a point to be very welcoming, to be very open, and to be encouraging. He cares

about us and our kids. (Interview, December 12, 2019)

Mr. Jones was very intentional in building relationships with his students and staff

members. He greeted students in the morning and modeled the positive behaviors he wanted

teachers and students to display in the school building. This intentionality with increasing the

relational capacity within the staff and students was evident. Victoria stated,

He loves us. He loves our kids. He thinks as them as children first, not just a number on a

test. He sees their potential first, just like he sees his teachers as people first and that we

are a family. That's how he supports us, that's how he loves us. (Interview, December 9,

2019)

Teacher Empowerment

With Blue Sky having new teachers each year, Mr. Jones recognized the importance of

building the instructional capacity within his faculty. The professional learning community

framework had been implemented to assist in the development of all teachers within the school

context. As Mr. Jones stated,

A successful PLC is balanced. You have to have balance. You have to have all teachers

equally participating because if one person bears the brunt of the load all the time with

the same job function, then it's not fair. You want to make sure that the way the PLC

functions is equitable to everybody. You might have to change roles week to week. Its

leadership—leadership within the grade levels, but you want those people to function in

harmony and with equity. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

In providing the resources and training for a sustainable PLC, Blue Sky hired an outside

PLC consultant to work closely with principals and teachers. This consultant outlined the PLC

framework for the faculty and met consistently with the staff. This arrangement provided

feedback to teachers and provided them a protocol for their student assessment data analysis. As James stated,

> We had a consultant come in and she provided PLC training. She would sit down with us and discuss our student assessment data. She would tell us everything she wanted and what she wanted us to do in the future. We would also meet as a grade level with her. This is how many of us learned what was expected in our PLCs. (Interview, December 12, 2019)

Throughout this training, many teachers resented the consultant's harsh approach and were reluctant to comply with the directives set forth. According to Victoria, "It was uncomfortable for a lot of teachers. Teachers would leave in tears sometimes. It's tough to really look at your data and have someone ask tough questions on how you are going to fix it" (Interview, December 5, 2019). As the training progressed, teachers became more comfortable with the expectations and felt empowered when analyzing assessment data and preparing interventions for their students.

Mr. Jones' Self- Reflection

As a new head principal, Mr. Jones recognized the importance of being purposeful in his approach to reflect on the school climate and culture and make adjustments as the year progresses:

> I think the successfulness of the way a PLC can move forward each year is being able to make sure that we take care of our teachers and we take care of our personnel. We make them want to stay here at Blue Sky and continue to be successful. We have team leaders and teacher mentors who understand the PLC framework and who assist other teachers. I want every one of my teachers to feel like they are an educational leader in the building. (Jones, interview, December 19, 2019)

He also stated the importance of communication within a school culture and his role in cultivating this within the school environment:

The communication level needs to increase amongst teacher and students. We need to

make sure that within the classroom our kids are aware of what the goals are for them to

learn. They're the ones driving the train. I need to get better at modeling this for my

teachers. (Jones, Interview, December 19, 2019)

Teachers' Roles within Blue Sky PLCs

At Blue Sky, new teachers were trained in the overall PLC model and framework.

Though many teachers to Blue Sky were new to the building, a core group of veteran teachers had

extensive training in the PLC model and served as PLC leaders and mentors to other faculty

members. Teachers were expected to align daily lessons with the state curriculum standards and

prepare their students for district mandated quarterly benchmark assessments. These test data

were reviewed and each school site and subject area were compared to other school sites within

the district. Teachers were expected and encouraged to attend PLC meetings and collaborate with

their colleagues. This message was reinforced by Mr. Jones throughout the school environment.

As Mr. Jones stated,

Collaboration is the key with PLCs. There's always sharing of data, there's sharing of

skill, there's sharing of the way that students are responding to their instruction, and they

are also developing remediation strategies. So, that's the expectation of teachers and we

make adjustments along the way. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

Strain of Teacher and Administrator Turnover

With Blue Sky's teacher and administrator turnover in the last six years, this had created

many challenges within the school culture and professional learning communities. Victoria

described the sustainability challenges within a PLC:

I think one of the challenges is the fact we have such a high turnover sometimes here. It's

hard. And that if you get a new PLC partner every single year, you get just… run down

because then you have to reinvent the wheel again. You need to teach somebody again,

and you need to do it again. And that's hard. (Interview, December 5, 2019)

According to Johnathon, "There's been a lot of building turnover in staff. So since I've been here, six years, I've had five new PLC partners and three different principals" (Interview, December 5, 2019). This constant administrator and teacher turnover made sustaining the effectiveness of a PLC very challenging. The increased change with teachers and administrators had created frustration among the teachers and fractured the continuity between professional learning communities throughout the school environment. As James stated, "It's been tough. This building has had three new head principals in the last four years. Plus this year, we also have two new assistant principals. Our entire administrative team is new" (Interview, December 12, 2019). All teacher participants identified reasons for the teacher and administrator turnover; however, they feel Mr. Jones was making strides in changing the school culture and felt optimistic for the future.

Decreased Teacher Accountability

Victoria described the school culture when she started at Blue Sky and explained there was strong support and focus toward the professional learning community framework within the school. This was modeled and reinforced by site leadership, "The principal would tell us to be at our scheduled PLC meeting… it is non-negotiable" (Interview, December 5, 2019). During her first few years with Blue Sky, the school district hired an outside PLC consultant to work closely with Blue Sky's administration and faculty for four years. This training introduced the PLC framework to the entire staff and brought a sense of accountability to the PLC implementation. As the PLC training stopped and new teachers and administrators entered the environment, the effectiveness of the collaborative school culture diminished at Blue Sky. As Johnathon shared,

> So when we first started doing PLCs, really sinking all our eggs in that basket. It was a
> sacred time. When we would come in for a PLC meeting, we would have an agenda and
> topics to discuss. We'd be like… How are we aligning our CFAs to our unit scores or our
> unit test? It's been a little bit more freewheeling lately. Where it's… let's talk about data.
> (Interview, December 5, 2019)

This was a theme throughout my observations and interviews with Blue Sky's environment. In speaking with teachers and observing PLC meetings within Blue Sky's environment, administrators were absent from the majority of PLC meetings I attended. This was the result of other scheduled meetings, dealing with student situations, or other administrative duties. The instructional coach was present at times during the grade level meetings; however, she did not have a formal agenda for observed PLC meetings. According to James,

> It all depends on the head principal and the instructional coach. I will say that now, they're not as involved because they are pulled in so many directions that they are not able to participate as much as we would like. I don't think it is a purposeful thing. I think it is a necessity thing. A few years ago, our principal and the assistant principals were very involved and generally we would see them at most every PLC meeting. (Interview, December 12, 2019)

Reduction of Institutional Knowledge

With the major changes in personnel, Blue Sky had lost institutional knowledge within the building. As Johnathon stated,

> We're on our third principal in the last six years. We had a principal that built a strong PLC culture. After he left, they [district administration] brought somebody else in who I don't think was prepared for the challenges this building has. So we had two years where we slid back and lost a lot of people. Lost institutional knowledge within the building. We now have a brand new administration team this year. I think our principal is trying to build that back up. (Interview, December 5, 2019)

James shared with me the PLC framework for Blue Sky and district initiatives expected by teachers and administrators within the school district. He had positive feedback relating to the outside PLC consultant working with staff members. However, he did mention not all PLC groups were successful. He believed it was determined by the adults' willingness and professionalism within the school environment:

I will emphasize that I think that every PLC is very different. And a lot of it comes down

to personalities and willingness to work together and professionalism, if you want it to

work, if youøre willing to do what is asked of you and willing to see the positives in it.

Because a lot of people look at it and see the negatives. (James, interview, December 12,

2019)

Calvary Middle School

The purpose of this section was to introduce the participants involved in the study and

describe Calvaryøs history and mission. A description of the overall structure of professional

learning community meetings and principal and teachersøroles within the PLC meetings were

included in this section.

Participant Profiles

At Calvary Middle School, I interviewed one administrator and three teachers. Two

teachers were veteran teachers, Susan and Melody, and one teacher, Amy, was a beginning

teacher. The administrator interviewed, Ms. Williams, was the head principal at Calvary.

Ms. Williams. Ms. Williams, the principal at Calvary, was in her seventh year. Ms.

Williams was passionate for education and in helping her students and school community

succeed. Ms. Williams had experience as a special education teacher and worked as an assistant

principal in Sandstone prior to her position at Calvary. As I learned of her journey, it was clear

district administration placed Ms. Williams at Calvary to be a change agent. With her PLC

knowledge and ability to increase the relational capacity within the school environment, Calvary

had experienced great gains in student achievement. She was intentional to lead by example and

models the behaviors she wanted her faculty to display.

Susan. Susan was in her third year at Calvary and a member of the Building Leadership

Team. Prior to accepting her teaching position, she worked for the school districtøs foundation,

the Sandstone Public School Foundation. The position provided Susan an opportunity to work in

the community and visit schools throughout the district. She mentioned her favorite part of the

position were the times that she had reasons to be out in the school buildings. During this time, she realized she had a desire to teach at the middle school level. Susan spoke of her work with the Building Leadership Team, revising Calvary's discipline policy this past summer and communicating the overall expectations for students and teachers with the school environment. "I feel very fortunate we have a strong set of procedures for the students and supportive administrators throughout the school district" (Interview, December 13, 2019).

Melody. Melody was in her seventh year of teaching English and first-year at Calvary. As we sat down, she shared with me her teaching experiences in another school district. In her words, "My last year was very toxic, and should have left the year before." Melody did not feel supported at her previous position and viewed Sandstone as a fresh start in her career. When asked about the school culture at Calvary, she stated, "It's like a family. I feel like I love everyone here. Ms. Williams is probably the best principal I've ever had. I couldn't have wished for a better transition" (Interview, December 13, 2019).

Amy. Amy was a beginning science teacher in her first year of teaching. Amy spent 10 years working with disadvantaged youth for a community organization and decided she wanted to continue her career path in public schools. After pursuing her alternative teaching certification, she embraced her new role as a sixth grade teacher. In speaking with Amy, I immediately sensed her enthusiasm for helping her students. When asked to describe the culture at Calvary, she stated, "We have a group of teachers that are super passionate about our kids. I've been in some schools where teachers were just there. And these are not those kind of teachers" (Interview, December 18, 2019).

Calvary Middle School History and Mission

Calvary Middle School opened in 1974 and is located in the Sandstone School District. When Calvary opened, the school was located in a new and developing neighborhood. As the years had passed, Calvary had experienced a number of changes throughout their community. This area of the district encompasses apartments, trailer parks and several old and rundown

neighborhoods. Student enrollment declined, lower socio-economic families moved into the area, resulting in new challenges for school administration and teachers. After many years of low academic achievement and teacher morale, Principal Williams was hired as a õchange agentö for Calvary. Ms. Williams worked tirelessly toward the mission of providing every student a free and appropriate public education. The following demographic information was obtained by the state department of educationøs 2018-2019 accountability report. Calvaryøs fall enrollment consisted of 837 students in grades six through eight. Calvary identified 19% of their student population as Caucasian, 18% Black, 2% Asian, 53% Hispanic, 3% Native American and 5% of their population were identified with two or more races. Calvary also identified 18% of their students as English Language Learners (ELL) and 18% of the student population received Special Education Services. Also, 93% of the student population qualified for free and/or reduced child nutrition program which includes breakfast and lunch.

School Setting

Though the building was built in 1974, the exterior of the structure was updated a few years ago. The entire facade and the main entrance of the building were updated. As I approached the main entrance of the building, I was re-directed to a side entrance. This new entrance was configured to aid in securing the building. After entering the building, I was buzzed in to the office by an administrative assistant. I immediately observed numerous motivational posters hanging on the walls. A large poster in the main office measured the student attendance rate for each day in the school environment. In assessing previous yearøs student attendance rates, chronic absenteeism is an issue the administration and faculty have identified to address within the school community. According to Principal Williams, õIn my seven years at Calvary, we have made great progress in academic achievement and our student attendance rates have improvedö (Interview, December 19, 2019).

Calvary employed one lead principal, two assistant principals, 52 teachers, and 10 support staff members to serve over 8oo students. In the last 10 years, Calvary had seen major

growth and changes in the demographic representation within their student population. In the past seven years, student enrollment has increased over 200 students. The Hispanic population had increased dramatically in the community Calvary served and many of the students entering school struggled with speaking and understanding English. Amy commented, õWe have a very large population of students that come to us that donøt speak any Englishö (Interview, December 18, 2019). Calvary also served a low-socioeconomic community, which was represented by 93 percent of their students qualifying for free and/or reduced meals. In speaking with Principal Williams, she described her journey the last seven years at Calvary:

> We have a very positive school climate. When I got here it was a hot mess. When I started, I followed a principal who was here for two years and the school was in deep trouble. Student academic achievement was low and teachers were defeated. So it was in bad shape, but it was in bad shape with nowhere to go but up. And so we just came together. I asked for teacher feedback and we just became a team. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

In her seven years as principal, Ms. Williams had created a positive school culture. A culture that is focused on student learning and professional collaboration with colleagues. As one teacher stated, õThe school environment is like a familyö (Susan, interview, December 12, 2019). As Ms. Williams stated,

> Weøre considered hashtag Calvary Family. I mean weøre just a family. We rely heavily on each other. Is every day perfect? No. Absolutely not. But we all know that we have each other and thatøs the kind of culture that we have. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

School Structure

Calvary Middle School implemented the middle school concept as the district moved from the junior high model to the middle school model. The building was a two story building with two main hallways, each identified for a specific grade level. Each grade level had two teams and two teachers for each core subject (English, Math, Science, and Social Studies).

Calvary had one lead principal and two assistant principals. Principal Williams commented, "We meet as an administrative team each Tuesday and Friday. We have a set time and set location. We discuss where we are in the instructional cycle" (Interview, December 19. 2019). Each administrator had over 10 years of administrative experience. Calvary also employed an instructional coach, who worked with each professional learning community member. Core subject teachers had daily common planning time, which enabled teachers to meet and collaborate each day. According to Melody, "We meet with our teams, the whole seventh grade on Mondays. We also meet as an individual PLC team on Fridays" (Interview, December 13, 2019).

Professional Learning Communities

Within Calvary's school environment, a collaborative school culture was modeled and reinforced by the administrative team. Ms. Williams and her assistant principals were very well versed and experienced in the professional learning community framework. Each administrator had completed extensive PLC training and understood their PLC role within Calvary's school environment. Calvary scheduled PLC meetings twice a week, one meeting as a grade level and one subject area meeting. PLC meetings were opportunities for teachers to discuss curriculum and teaching strategies. It was the expectation at Calvary that teachers teach the same topics and create common formative assessments. An assistant principal stated, "The district likes to micro-manage each site and expects us to be aligned with their curriculum map" (Observation, December 6, 2019). The purpose of common formative assessments was for teachers to be able to discuss their teaching strengths and weaknesses. This collaborative culture is reinforced and modeled by site and district administration. Melody stated, "I think the school district is very hands on, very. But I think that it is what the kids actually need. So since they have the kid's best interest in mind, it doesn't bother me at all" (Interview, December 13, 2019).

For this study, I observed four PLC meetings within Calvary Middle School. These observations were chronicled to examine the roles of the principal and teachers within this school context. A description of each PLC meeting is reported in the narrative below.

Seventh grade English PLC. As I entered the school environment on my first visit, I immediately noticed an assistant principal preparing for morning announcements. I informed the receptionist I was there to observe a PLC meeting and I proceeded to sign in. The receptionist introduced me to the assistant principal and gave me directions to the classroom for the meeting. My visit occurred on a Friday, and I was informed many teachers and administrators were out for the day; however, I proceeded to the room to attend an English PLC meeting. As Ms. Williams stated, "One of the challenges with PLCs is on days when our teacher attendance is low. It's tough to collaborate when people are gone" (Interview, December 19, 2019). I entered the classroom and introduced myself to the teacher. She was in the process of preparing for her colleagues to arrive for the meeting. As I found a chair in the back of the room, I observed a second teacher enter the classroom. She informed us the other English teachers were absent and would not be attending the meeting. For this meeting, the two members of the PLC did not have an agenda; however, they did discuss curriculum and student assessments for the upcoming week. According to Melody, "We have those four [PLC] questions posted around the school. What are we teaching and why are we teaching it? How do we know they have learned it? And what do we do if they don't" (Interview, December 13, 2019). For this school, district administration provide a specific curriculum map for all core teachers to follow each day of the school year. This curriculum map identifies academic standards and skills each teacher is required to teach and assess in their classroom.

The teachers began discussing common formative assessments they would create for the upcoming week. Both teachers were cordial with one another and seemed driven to complete the plan for the following week. As I observed the teachers, I discovered the lead teacher in this meeting was new to this school environment and was given district-wide PLC training during the summer months. Susan commented, "After attending the professional development trainings, I had a lot of new [teaching] tools for my toolbox to be able to use in my classroom" (Interview, December 12, 2019). The second teacher was also new to the school environment this school

year. Both teachers reviewed district unit objectives and unit assessments throughout the meeting. During the thirty-five minute meeting, both teachers discussed collaboratively curriculum objectives, student assessments and lesson plans. Both teachers seemed rushed throughout the meeting, making copies for the day, discussing curriculum mapping and preparing for future academic assessments. In this school environment, professional learning community meetings were scheduled for Tuesday and Fridays. Both of these teachers were new to the building and reasonably new to the professional learning community framework.

Seventh grade math PLC. With the meeting starting at 8:40 am, I entered the classroom at 8:35 and sat in the back of the room. Two female math teachers were in the classroom discussing the absence of teachers in the building and how it would affect their Friday schedule. I waited until they finished their conversation and introduced myself. The lead teacher welcomed me and was quick to inform me they usually have a school administrator present in their PLC meetings; however, they recently were informed the assistant principal assigned to their PLC was not at school. Melody commented, "Sometimes the principals are unable to attend the [PLC] meetings and we just continue to review our instructional cycle" (Interview, December 13, 2019). The two teachers proceeded to sit at a round table together and began a conversation related to their math curriculum, specifically the district curriculum map. A third teacher entered the classroom and sat at a separate table. The lead teacher acknowledged the third teacher's presence and proceeded with the conversation: "Good morning… good to see you. We just started to discuss our last assessment… we also need to start to unpack unit four" (Observation, November 15, 2019). After a few minutes, the lead teacher asked the third teacher to join them at the round table. All teachers were involved in the discussion and were cordial toward one another. The lead teacher was asking each teacher for specific feedback: "Did you assess your students at the end of the week? Remember we need to be aligned with the district [curriculum] map" (Observation, November 15, 2019).

Throughout the conversation, topics included the district's curriculum map, specific math skills needing review, student assessments, student achievement and diagnostics, remediation for students and teaching strategies implemented for specific skill development. The third teacher exited the classroom prior to the end of the meeting. The other two teachers continued their planning for the upcoming week and concluded the meeting at 9:10am.

Eighth grade science PLC. After signing in with the office, the administrative assistant asked me how she could help me. I informed her I was planning on attending a science PLC meeting and asked if the meeting was still scheduled for 10:00. She replied, she would check with the assistant principal to make sure they were meeting. After speaking with the administrator, she gave me a "visitor" sticker and directed me toward the conference room. She explained I would need to travel through the library and the conference room was located at the back of the library. I thanked her for her time and information and proceeded toward the library. As I entered the conference room, I immediately noticed the walls were covered with charts and graphs. After a closer look, I noticed each grade level, subject area, and teacher were represented on the charts and graphs. The conference room was also the school's "data room." All data from summative assessments were posted on the charts, so each teacher and administrator could see the student achievement. The charts identified essential skills and curriculum standards students had progressed to mastery, students approaching mastery, and students needing remediation. According to Susan, "We use Mastery Connect to help analyze student test data and then come together to discuss our plan moving forward with remediation" (Interview, December 13, 2019).

Within a few moments, two science teachers and an assistant principal entered the conference room. I briefly introduced myself and explained why I was attending the meeting. They quickly began discussing their curriculum, specifically instructional strategies. One of the teachers began explaining the effectiveness of a specific instructional strategy she used to teach one of the science concepts to her students. Both teachers were collaborating about instructional strategies and planning future lessons for the upcoming Science Olympiad in their school. The

assistant principal began asking for the feedback regarding their õinstructional roundsö experience and specifically their thoughts on using the õflipped classroomö concept in their own classroom: õWhen you visited the classrooms, did you get any new ideas that you may use in your own classö (Observation, December 6, 2019). Instructional rounds consist of teachers visiting other certified teachersøclassrooms and observing their overall classroom management, lesson sequencing and transitions, and closure for the lesson. The flipped classroom concept is basically creating an instructional video over the desired skill or lesson and instructing the students to view the video prior to class. After viewing the lesson at home, the time spent in the actual classroom consists of students completing the lesson, asking questions on the lesson and/or moving on to an enrichment activity/lesson. Both teachers expressed their enjoyment in visiting other classrooms and learning from their colleagues. When the assistant principal asked about the flipped classroom concept: õDo you think that is something you would try in your own classroomö (Observation, December 6, 2019). Both teachers expressed an interest in learning more about the concept. The assistant principal was facilitating the meeting and seemed to have good rapport with the teachers within the group. However, the two teachers seemed to be driving the discussion and focused on sharing ideas with one another: õWhat are your ideas for the Science Olympiad next month? Have you started to discuss this with your kidsö (Observation, December 6, 2019). This assistant principal informed me he was new to this building; however, he had previous experience with the professional learning community framework and as an administrator in the school district. The assistant principal asked probing questions from time to time; however, the main facilitators of the meeting were the teachers. In depth conversation on instructional strategies; however no discussion on student assessment data.

Eighth grade math PLC. At the completion of a science PLC I was observing, the assistant principal informed me the next PLC meeting would be starting in a few minutes in the same conference room. Within a few minutes, two math teachers entered the conference room. I introduced myself and informed them of the reason for my attendance during their PLC meeting.

An assistant principal entered the room and began speaking with the teachers. I immediately noticed the administrator's strong personality. She was very knowledgeable with the professional learning community framework and seemed comfortable leading the conversations. The discussion included the importance of "essential standards" and more specifically the "power standards" each student should be learning. According to Melody, "The district provides graphic organizers and visual organizers to assist teachers with scaffolding each standard. It's incredibly valuable" (Interview, December 13, 2019). The discussion moved toward the district curriculum pacing guide for each subject area. The school district has created curriculum pacing guides and curriculum benchmark assessments for a number of years. Each school site is held accountable for these assessments and compared to school sites within the district. The assistant principal asked the teachers where they were on track with curriculum pacing guide and how their students were doing with each learning objective. The meeting included discussion on instructional rounds and the flipped classroom concept. An assistant principal asked, "I know making the videos are time intensive but do you think you guys are receptive to trying it [flipped classroom model] out in the next few weeks" (Observation, December 6, 2019).

As I was observing the meeting, suddenly the assistant principal was informed she needed to address an issue in one of the classrooms. The teachers, who remained in the PLC meeting, said it was a possible situation pertaining to a student being in possession of an illegal substance. With the sudden interruption and departure of the assistant principal, the two math teachers shared a few anecdotal teaching stories with one another and proceeded to conclude the meeting. The majority of the meeting was focused on curriculum, assessments and remediation opportunities for their students. However, once the assistant principal left the meeting, the teachers were not as focused on these topics. However, once the assistant principal exited the meeting, the two teachers strayed of topic. Both teachers were quick to get off topic and began discussing other non-school related topics.

Site Leadership

Calvary had a lead principal, two assistant principals, and an instructional coach. All administrators had worked for Sandstone Public Schools for over seven years and had been trained extensively in the professional learning community model. Calvary had welcomed a new assistant principal to their staff; however, this administrator was a veteran administrator in the district. Each Calvary administrator had a specific role in the PLC framework and Ms. Williams was extremely purposeful in communicating and modeling the behaviors she wanted displayed by her administrative team. Each administrator brought their own personality and specific skill set to the professional learning community at Calvary. Both assistant principals had been employed with Sandstone for many years and been trained extensively in the professional learning community framework. However, each administrator used a different approach in facilitating, leading, and supporting each professional learning community.

Principals' role within Calvary PLCs. Each member of the administrative team at Calvary Middle School had a specific role within the PLC framework. Each member had an assigned core subject and was expected to meet with their group during the scheduled meetings. When Ms. Williams was asked to describe her role in the professional learning community, she stated,

> Ideally, I don't like to do a whole lot of talking in our PLC meetings. This isn't about me. I'm just there for support. And so I try to offer ideas here and there. I've had to refocus groups because it is easier for them to just get into planning. I love the planning, but we need to make sure we're specific as to what skills we are hitting and why. So my role is to support and then just to refocus the group when I need to. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

The administrative team met every Monday to discuss each PLC group and determine each team's placement in the instructional cycle. Also, they discussed specific groups that may need

additional support and guidance from administration. In describing her PLC expectations for her faculty, she stated,

> The main message coming from me to all of my PLC teams is, it's non-negotiable. We
> don't miss PLCs unless your absent or covering a class. Other than that, we are in the
> conference room. We are not asking them to do anything that we're not sitting there
> doing with them. And they know, it's what we do. (Williams, interview, December 19,
> 2019)

Collaborative Culture

As the Calvary principal, Ms. Williams had worked the last seven years to build a collaborative school culture that was conducive to her faculty's collective efficacy. As Susan stated,

> I think for teachers it's very familial. We rely on each other. We have some really tough
> kids that unfortunately have experienced a lot of trauma, a lot of unrest. I think our
> principals do a great job building that familial vibe between faculty and staff. There's a
> real supportive frame of mind at this school. (Interview, December 12, 2019)

As one teacher stated, *"*We unpack our standards that we receive from our department chair and create lessons aligned to the essential standards. It's definitely collaborative" (Melody, interview, December 18, 2019). Other faculty members have experienced this collaborative culture as well. According to Susan,

> There's a real supportive frame of mind here at Calvary. We are encouraged to go into
> classrooms and observe other teachers and see what they are doing with their lessons. It is
> a really collaborative environment as far as staff and faculty go. I feel really thankful for
> that because I feel as a new teacher, especially a non-traditional pathway teacher, a
> collaborative culture is beneficial. (Interview, December 12, 2019)

Data Driven Decision Making

Within Calvary's school context, Ms. Williams and her administrative team were active participants of each PLC meeting. This involvement included analyzing student assessment data on a weekly basis. Ms. Williams stated,

We have a set time and location each week to talk about where we are in the instructional cycle for our kids. This data day allows us to look at each student and identify if they passed or failed the assessment. Then we start looking at individual questions on the assessment. Once we look at the data then we start planning for the next assessment. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

Teachers are given the resources to guide their instruction and lesson planning. As Melody stated, õWe are given a tool to work through scaffolding every instructional standard. We work through the progressions, the depth of knowledge progressions, even to extension for my honors class. This is helpful as a teacherö (Interview, December 13, 2019). Calvary's administration also focused on holding teachers accountable within each professional learning community. As Melody stated,

I believe what makes the PLCs more productive here [Calvary MS] is that administrators sit in on PLC meetings. We discuss student assessment data and ways to remediate for our students. Having administrators present during the meetings makes everyone accountable. (Interview, December 13, 2019)

Increased ELL Population

Calvary had experienced an increase in student enrollment throughout Ms. Williams' tenure as principal. Specifically, the increase of ELL students had increased to nearly twenty percent of the student population. This had created additional challenges for administrators and teachers. According to Williams,

It's a struggle meeting the needs of all of our students. We have a large number of kids that are on grade level and above and we also have a large number that are below grade

level. The high number of Spanish speakers is a challenge. This year we put them in

sheltered classes where they work together, they travel together. So that's helped but it is

still hard. You sit down in front of a group of people that speak a different language, then

they [State Department of Education] expect you to teach them 12 standards in a

semester. That's the struggle. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

Ms. Williams recognized the many challenges within the school's context: community

poverty, large class sizes and an increase in Spanish speaking students. However, she remained

positive about Calvary's future and continued to be an advocate for her building and her students:

"We are blessed to have time each week to collaborate. That's the message everyone hears from

me. PLCs are valuable time, non-negotiable. Not every school has this time built into their

schedule so we are thankful (Williams, interview, December 19, 2019).

Teachers' Roles within Calvary PLCs

At Calvary, the teacher's roles consisted of being receptive and embracing the

collaborative culture. Ms. Williams stated,

It's a time to work together, and their role is to just work together and to know that we

don't always have to agree. We don't always have to teach the exact same things, in the

exact same manner. But we need to be on the same page with what the standards are that

we are teaching. That's the culture we have built. We are a team. (Interview, December

19, 2019)

In speaking with teachers at Calvary, this culture of collaboration was referenced many times.

Melody stated, "In this collaborative culture it feels like a family. I view my role as more of a

leader since I have had experience with PLCs and my partner has not" (Interview, December 13,

2019). The PLC cultural shift from focused strictly on teaching to ensuring every student is

learning is evident at Calvary. Conversations revolve around student assessment data, ideas for

student interventions, curriculum alignment within the subject area, and searching for new

strategies to increase student achievement and progress. This collaborative culture focused on the goal of increasing teachers' collective efficacy within the school environment:

> I feel that my role is to understand how my students learn so that when I'm organizing and planning lessons around the standards. I can try to proactively see where they might have difficulty to make sure that when I'm explaining things or teaching them, that I'm giving them the space to be confused and then find clarity. (Amy, interview, December 18, 2019)

Administrative Support

Within Calvary's school environment, the administration have provided the entire faculty the time and resources to meet each week within their professional learning community teams. This was the first step in creating an effective collaborative culture within the learning environment. Administration worked toward proactive approaches in dealing with student inappropriate behaviors and other student challenges. Amy commented,

> Our administration is serious about behavior. Not just discipline. Sometimes it's about finding out what's at the core because we have a lot of kids that are homeless, kids couch surfing, that don't eat every night. So many times it's not just about discipline. (Interview, December 13, 2019)

The administrators at Calvary are also purposeful in cultivating a familial culture within the school building. Ms. Williams and her administrative team work closely with the faculty at Calvary to identify educational resources for teachers and students. Susan mentioned she felt supported by administration and believed her classroom resources requests were genuinely considered by Ms. Williams. Recently, Susan was granted permission to purchase a needed technological application for her students and she was extremely grateful. According to Susan, "Administration and especially Ms. Williams, supports us and wants the very best for our kids. This is why this school feels like a family. Unfortunately, I haven't experienced this in other school districts" (Interview, December 12, 2019).

Professional Development

As a new teacher to the profession, Susan was extremely appreciative of the professional development training provided at Calvary and at the district level. Throughout the interview, she expressed her support of Sandstone's õNew Teacher Academy,ö district-wide professional development learning opportunities, and the administrative support she receives at Calvary. After completing her student teaching assignment, Amy knew she wanted to work with low-socioeconomic students and was excited for her opportunity at Calvary:

> So I think one thing that makes PLCs more productive here is that administrators sit in on them. So in every school I've been to, administrators are not in those meetings and it changes everything. The accountability is there, so you can't gripe about students when you're supposed to be planning for your benchmark. You can't vent about your personal life. I've been in schools were the PLC meetings were not even academic. Teachers come in and are ready to leave, it's not a community where you talk about what you're teaching and they don't look at data after assessments, which is a really key thing. (Amy, interview, December 13, 2019)

Ms. Williams recognized the importance of retaining effective teachers and was purposeful in providing professional development training and support to all of her faculty members. Teachers shared the support they felt from administration and mentioned the opportunity to observe veteran teachers in õaction.ö These õinstructional roundsö provided teachers the opportunity to observe instructional strategies and discuss how they can implement the new ideas into their own teaching.

Summary

Chapter IV presents professional learning communities as a system-wide school reform initiative to increase the collective efficacy of teachers and administrators. Because the two middle schools selected are located in the same school district, a description of district-wide reforms and initiatives are included. Finally, the stories of the two middle schools are presented to

help identify and explain the roles of the principals' and teachers' within the professional learning communities. Chapter V analyzes how teachers' and principals' roles inhibit or promote the success of each professional learning community through the lens of cultural theory.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The case studies and information presented in Chapter IV were used to analyze the data in this chapter. The purpose of the study is through cultural theory, to explore principalsø and teachersø roles in professional learning communities in two selected school contexts. The theoretical framework selected for this study was Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory. This chapter will discuss the application of cultural theory in relationship to the participantsø views about professional learning communities. The common themes that emerged from the school contexts are also presented in Chapter V.

Cultural Theory

Mary Douglas (1982, 1986) offered a typology that helps educators meet conceptual and methodological challenges inherent in cultural inquiry and educational practice. According to Harris (2015), her typology of grid and group is useful, as it

- provides a matrix to classify school contexts,

- draws specific observations about individualsø values, beliefs, and behaviors,

- is designed to take into account the total social environment as well as the interrelationships among school members and their context, and

- explains how constructed contextual meanings are generated and transformed.

Grid and Group Typology

In Douglas's (1982, 1986) frame, grid refers to the degree to which an individual's choices are constrained within a social system by imposed prescriptions such as role expectations, rules, and procedures. Grid can be plotted on a continuum from strong to weak. In strong- grid environments, teachers typically do not have the freedom to select their own curricula and textbooks, and many decisions are made at the upper levels of administration. The high end of the grid continuum is where individuals are controlled by rules and strict guidelines. Individuals located in the high grid portion of the continuum would not interact with other individuals and would operate under the strictest of requirements and obligations. Their individual behavior would be based only on what they perceived they were supposed to do for themselves; it would not include flexibility or experimentation (Douglas, 1982, 1986). The behavior of individuals in high grid is controlled by organizational rules (Harris, 1995). At the weak- end of the grid continuum, teachers are given much more autonomy in choosing curricula, texts and methods. The lowest end of the grid continuum is where the individual is not encumbered or responsible to specific rules. Individuals in this area have more autonomy and higher degrees of personal freedom (Case, 2010; Stansberry, 2001).

The concept of õgroupö takes into account the holistic picture of the social unit in the culture under study. According to Harris (2015), õGroup represents the degree to which people value collective relationships and the extent to which they are committed to the larger social unitö (p.40). The õgroup variable indicates individualsø interactions to expose the extent to which they are willing to devote effort and energy to creating or maintaining a group synergyö (Stansberry, 2001). Similar to grid, group has a continuum of strong to weak. In strong-group environments, specific membership criteria exist, and explicit pressures influence collective relationships. In weak-group environments, the pressure for group-focused activities and relationships is relatively low. As the group dimension moves toward the stronger end of the continuum, members are more accountable and responsible as role players in their group (Stansberry, 2001).

Mary Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory posited that four distinct ways of lifeô individualism, hierarchism, authoritarianism and egalitarianismô shape and are shaped by the grid and group dynamics of a given context (Harris, 2015). These cultural preferences are influenced by the consistent social interaction with other members of the group or culture. Each study participant aligned with one or more of these cultural preferences. In Table 2, the criteria used for the grid and group classifications are presented.

Table 2

Grid and Group Leadership Criteria (Harris, 2015)

Leadership Functions	*Bureaucratic*	*Individualist*	*Corporate*	*Collectivist*
	(strong-grid/ weak-group)	(weak grid/ weak-group)	(strong grid/ strong-group)	(weak-grid/ strong-group)
Adaptive Behavior	Directive leadership	Delegating leadership	Coaching leadership	Supporting leadership
Source of Power	Positional leadership power	Personal leadership power	Positional leadership power	Personal leadership power
Leadership Control	Principal actively involved in oversight	Principal minimizes involvement in oversight	Principal focused on group and teacher needs	Teachers control day-to-day process
Decision Making	Situationally negotiated	Centralized	Centralized	Consensus

Blue Sky Middle School: Individualist (Weak Grid, Weak Group)

In observing professional learning community meetings and interviewing participants within Blue Sky's environment, emerging themes were identified that placed Blue Sky in the individualist quadrant. Due to recent teacher and administrator turn over, Blue Sky displayed weak group characteristics. In speaking with Johnathon, he shared his experience with the recent administrator and teacher turn over:

> So there's been a lot of building turnover in staff. From last year to this year, there's only four people in my hallway alone that are left from last year. And the same story could be told up and down a lot of the team core hallways. So, since I've been here six years, I've had five different PLC partners. (Interview, December 7, 2019)

This constant change within the staff created a lack of commitment by teachers to the larger social unit. Victoria stated that challenges with that come with high teacher turnover, specifically when this results in a new PLC partner: "We have such a high teacher turnover and if you get a new PLC partner every single year, you get run down." Teacher turnover undermines social cohesion and sustained teacher collaboration in the schools (Talbert, 2011). As a first year principal, Mr. Jones was working to build the collegiality within the school context; however, changing a school culture takes time and strategic planning.

Another indication of the individualist setting was the moderate grid characteristics displayed within Blue Sky's school context. Though teachers were encouraged to attend PLC meetings and engage in meaningful collaboration, administrative participation and attendance was lacking. For example, throughout my observations of four Blue Sky's PLC meetings, I did not observe administrators present during the meetings. The instructional coach was present for two PLC meetings I observed; however, teachers continued to experience high levels of autonomy within the groups.

Mr. Jones displayed a desire to create a high functioning professional learning community within Blue Sky; however, his absence from PLC meetings negatively affected the

collaborative culture. He stated, "It is an expectation for our administrators to attend PLC meetings; however, sometimes we get pulled away to address other situations in the school building" (Interview, December 19, 2019). According to Leonard and Leonard (2001),

> Professional collaboration is evidenced when teachers and administrators work together, share their knowledge, contribute ideas and develop plans for purpose of achieving educational and organizational goals. In effect, collaborative practice is exemplified when school staff members come together on a regular basis in their continuing attempts to be more effective teachers so their students can become more successful learners. (p. 10)

With the many responsibilities of site administrators, Mr. Jones and his assistant principals struggled to find a balance between taking care of other administrative duties and attending PLC meetings. Because of the change in the school's administrative team and faculty, Blue Sky had changed quadrants over the past few years. This was alluded to in the interviews when several participants discussed the change in the school leadership, student demographics and student enrollment. For example, Blue Sky had experienced three new principals within the previous four years, an increase of lower socio-economic families, and an overall decrease in student enrollment (Interviews, December, 2019).

Blue Sky was aligned more with a corporate environment a few years ago and then transitioned to the current individualist frame with the current administration. However, Mr. Jones was working to build a more effective collaborative school culture and teachers within Blue Sky's environment believed the school was headed in the right direction. As James stated, "There is definitely a more collaborative feel within the building this year" (Interview, December 12, 2019).

Professional Learning Communities

The professional learning community model is based on purposeful and strategic professional collaboration with teachers and administrators within a learning environment. According to Barth (2006),

85

The PLC structure is one of continuous adult learning, strong collaboration, democratic

participation, and consensus about the school environment and culture. In such a collegial

culture, educators talk with one another about their practice, share knowledge, observe

one another, and root for one another's success. (p.126)

This environment of collaboration may actually look very different from school site to

school site. However, the basic tenets of a PLC should always have student learning at the

forefront of all discussions. As I observed the PLC meetings within Blue Sky's environment, I

recognized each meeting had the same overall structure; however, the interaction between

participants was different. For example, the eighth grade English PLC members were very

collaborative and discussed instructional strategies and the development of lesson plans. Both

PLC members were veteran teachers and had experience working with one another for a few

years. In observing the eighth grade science PLC, members were beginning teachers within the

profession and were engaged in a brief conversation pertaining to an upcoming assessment. Both

members had less than two years at Blue Sky and were new to the professional learning

framework (Observations, December, 2019). According to Barth (2006),

Relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character

and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything else… The

relationships among the educators in the school define all relationships within the

school's culture. (p. 8)

Eighth grade English PLC: Collectivist (Strong Group, Weak Grid). In observing

this professional learning community, Victoria and her PLC partner demonstrated a strong

rapport with each other and were focused on student assessment data. For example, both teachers

started the meeting by reviewing student test data from a previous assessment and transitioned to

discussing how they could adjust their instruction for future remediation opportunities with

students (Observation, December 2, 2019). This PLC demonstrated strong group characteristics

and moderate grid characteristics. The meeting was focused on instructional strategies and the

development of lesson plans. Though Sandstone does provide a curriculum map for all core subject areas, teachers have the autonomy to create formative assessments throughout the school year. As Victoria stated, õThe district wants us to stay with the curriculum map and teach the standards but we do have flexibility in creating our weekly assessmentsö (Observation, December 2, 2019).

As I listened to the teachers collaborate, two main themes emerged from my observation. The first theme was a strong and comfortable rapport both teachers had for one another. As Victoria stated, õI have found a partner here that I call my PLC wife. We are comfortable with sharing our data and discussing best practices. I think itøs rare what my PLC partner and I have together. We trust each otherö (Interview, December 9, 2019). This trust was established from years of working together at Blue Sky. Another theme was õdata driven decision making.ö Victoria and her PLC partner were discussing their studentsø assessment data and formulating plans with this information: õI think data is important and I think you can wrap your standards around really cool lessons your kids will be learning. Itøs innovative. Itøs fun. But they are still working toward the required standardsö (Victoria, interview, December, 9, 2019). Both of these emerging themes were not consistent with other PLC meetings within Blue Sky.

Throughout my interview and observations, Victoria demonstrated traits aligned with the egalitarian profile. She was very sociable with her PLC partner and commented she preferred strong support from administration; however, enjoyed autonomy to make decisions regarding lesson planning and curriculum. With new administrative leadership within the school environment, Victoria and her PLC partner have become a model to other teachers and PLC groups within the school context. As Victoria stated, õOther PLCS in the building have to come and watch us. They sit and listen to our conversations and observe the overall framework.ö

Eighth grade science PLC: Individualist (Weak Group, Weak Grid). As I observed the eighth grade science PLC meeting, both teachers had good rapport with one another; however, the conversation throughout the meeting was informal and the teachers did not have an agenda to

guide the meeting. The emerging themes from my observation were the informality of the meeting and the lack of in-depth conversations regarding student learning and assessments. This was evident by the casual approach to the meeting. For example, one teacher was sitting on top of a desk and the meeting was completed within 20 minutes (Observation, December 10, 2019). Teachers are allotted 50 minutes for PLC meetings at Blue Sky Middle School.

Both teachers aligned with the individualism profile and seemed disinterested in participating in strong, in-depth collaboration. One teacher stated, õDo you feel like your students are ready to test next week? If not, we can just waitö (Observation, December 10, 2019). Conversations regarding specific student assessment data and in-depth interventions/ remediation were not observed. This may be attributed to the teachersølack of teaching experience and accountability within the PLC framework. Both teachers had less than two years of teaching experience and were lacking extensive training with the professional learning community framework. This PLC meeting did not have an administrator or instructional coach present to facilitate the meeting so the teachers were not as thorough as witnessed by the eighth grade English PLC. A PLC member stated, õWe sometimes have a principal or the instructional coach with us during our PLC time; however, most of the time we are aloneö (Observation, December, 10, 2019).With the absence of an administrator, teachers were not held accountable or guided through the collaborative process. This absence of administrative leadership within the PLC meetings was an emerging theme throughout the PLC meetings observed. This PLC meeting demonstrated weak group and weak grid characteristics.

Eighth grade level PLC: Bureaucratic (Weak Group, Strong Grid). This PLC meeting consisted of all eighth grade teachers. Teachers were seated at tables with their PLC partners throughout the room. The school counselor was providing information for an upcoming grade-level wide standardized assessment, and teachers seemed disinterested with the process. Teachers were engaged in other activities, including checking their phones, grading papers and holding conversations at their tables. There was not an administrator present for the meeting and

many teachersø behaviors aligned with the individualism profile. After observing the meeting, the two emerging themes were a lack of structure throughout the meeting and a sense of isolation within the groups. For example, as the counselor shared information with the group, many group members were asking questions and seemed frustrated with the process. Many teachers were complaining about having to administer the assessments and voiced their displeasure with the situation (Observation, December 2, 2019). As Johnathon stated,

> Itøs supposed to be a time we are looking at data reflectively. Where youøre supposed to have a principal in there with you. Asking questions regarding our CFAs, our instructional cycle and what are we doing for remediation. We havenøt been getting a lot of that intervention or pushing from our principals. (Interview, December 5, 2019)

This PLC demonstrated weak group and moderate grid characteristics as evidenced by the outlined expectations from the school counselor regarding the procedures for the upcoming assessment and the lack of group support and interest. As stated by the counselor, õI understand some of you are frustrated but you need to pay attention to my directions because you will be expected to administer this assessment next weekö (Observation, December, 2, 2019).

Sixth grade level PLC: Individualist (Weak Group, Weak Grid). Participants included all sixth grade teachers for this PLC meeting. In observing the interaction between the participants, I identified two emerging themes from the meeting: absence of leadership and a lack of accountability during the meeting. According to James,

> Itøs tough. We donøt get to see our head principal as much in our PLCs, every once in a while, but that is definitely a demanding position and you never know when youøre going to get pulled into all these different things. (Interview, December 12, 2019)

Similar to the eighth grade level PLC meeting, teachers were sitting with their PLC partner and were not interacting with the other grade level members in the meeting. The instructional coach was late to the meeting so teachers were engaged in vastly different conversations. Some teachers were analyzing student test data and discussing their plans for academic remediation. Other

groups were discussing topics not aligned with the PLC framework. Without administrative

involvement, groups were off task and isolated within the meeting. This resulted in many teachers

leaving the meeting after a few minutes. This PLC meeting demonstrated weak group and weak

grid characteristics. Participants were engaged in a multitude of activities during the meeting.

Many participants were aligned with the individualism and egalitarian profiles.

Calvary Middle School: Corporate (Strong Grid, Strong Group)

In observing professional learning community meetings and interviewing participants

within Calvary Middle School, emerging themes were identified that placed this school context in

the corporate quadrant. Two emerging themes in Calvary were the familial culture and

professional accountability for all teachers. The collaborative culture had been cultivated by Ms.

Williams and her assistant principals over her seven years as head principal. Prior to her tenure,

the school culture was in the weak group quadrant, evidenced by the high teacher turnover and

low student enrollment. Ms. Williams had been purposeful in her approach toward building the

collective efficacy of her faculty and the collegiality within the school context. She had also

created opportunities to build relationships with the larger school community, by holding school

sponsored events to attract families to the school. As Susan stated, õI think our principals do a

great job building a familial culture throughout the building, between faculty and staff members.

They schedule time we get together for meals and other relationship building activities.ö

(Interview, December 12, 2019).

The second emerging theme from Calvary was the professional accountability fostered

throughout the building. Students were held accountable with a detailed discipline plan and high

expectations; however, teachers and administrators were also purposeful in building the relational

capacity with their students and community members. Calvaryøs administration also focused on

holding teachers accountable within each professional learning community. In describing her

PLC expectations for her faculty, Ms. Williams stated, õThe main message coming from me to all

of my PLC teams is, itøs non-negotiable. We donøt miss PLCs unless your absent or covering a

classö (Interview, December 19, 2019). This message of accountability was modeled not only by Ms. Williams but also her assistant principals embraced this message. As Melody stated, õI believe what makes the PLCs more productive here [Calvary MS] is that administrators sit in on PLC meetings. We discuss student assessment data and ways to remediate for our students. Having administrators present during the meetings makes everyone accountableö (Interview, December 13, 2019). Calvary demonstrated characteristics that supported a strong group and strong grid classification, ultimately placing them in the corporate quadrant on the grid and group continuum.

Professional Learning Communities

Within Calvaryøs school environment, a collaborative school culture was modeled and reinforced by the administrative team. Ms. Williams and her assistant principals were very well versed and experienced in the professional learning community framework. Each administrator had completed extensive PLC training and understood their PLC role within Calvaryøs school environment. As Ms. Williams stated, õI am very fortunate to have experienced administrators, who have had extensive training with the PLC framework and Marzanoøs Instructional Cycleö (Interview, December 19, 2019). Calvary scheduled PLC meetings twice a week, one meeting as a grade level and one subject area meeting. PLC meetings were opportunities for teachers to discuss curriculum and teaching strategies. It was the expectation at Calvary that teachers taught the same topics and created common formative assessments. As Ms. Williams stated, õAs we finish a unit assessment, we look at our data. We have a data day where we just go through and look how each student did on the assessment. And then we start planning for the next assessmentö (Interview, December 19, 2019).

Seventh grade math PLC: Corporate (Strong Group, Strong Grid). In observing the seventh grade math PLC, the emerging themes from my observation revolved around the teachersø ability and willingness to stay focused on the essential topics of the PLC meeting, such as curriculum, assessments, and remediation, even though the administrator was not present. As

the team leader stated, õIs everyone staying on track with the curriculum map because we need to schedule an assessment for next weekö (Observation, November 15, 2019). They also displayed good rapport with one another as they collaborated throughout the meeting. This was evident as they were seated at the same table, each having an opportunity to share with the group their thoughts and ideas pertaining to their studentsø progress and achievement. As stated by one of the PLC members, õThank you for sharing the technique you used for *DESMOS,* it helped me communicate that skill with my kidsö (Observation, November 15, 2019). This PLC meeting demonstrated strong group and strong grid characteristics. Each participant in the meeting had a role and the overall structure and expected outcome were clear within the group. There was a clear facilitator in the meeting and conversations focused on the districtøs curriculum map and upcoming student assessments. In observing the group dynamic, the facilitator aligned with the hierarch profile. The two additional participants aligned more with the egalitarian profile. Egalitarians are sociable and cooperative and will change their opinion for the good of the group if needed. A PLC member stated, õMy students are ready to test this week; however, if I need to reschedule until next week I willö (Observation, November 15, 2019). They also prefer a high-supportive/low-directive approach to supervision where subordinates have control over day-to-day decision making.

Seventh grade English PLC: Corporate (Strong Group, Strong Grid). As I observed this meeting, an emerging theme was the absence of team members at the meeting. Usually the meeting would involve other teachers and an administrator or instructional coach. On this specific day, many teachers were absent from school. The next emerging theme was the initiative these two teachers displayed in moving forward without administrative direction and staying focused on core topics during the meeting. Both of these teachers were new to the building and reasonably new to the professional learning community framework; however, they were purposeful in their discussion. Topics of discussion included curriculum mapping, student assessment data and lesson planning for an upcoming summative assessment. This PLC meeting demonstrated strong

group and strong grid characteristics. Both teachers were working well together and sharing ideas and instructional strategies. They also discussed the instructional frameworks and tools given to teachers from administration. As Melody commented, õWe are given a tool to unpack the standard and work through scaffolding the specific standard. This helps with the depth of knowledge progressions for our studentsö (Interview, December 13, 2019). In observing the group dynamic, the PLC partners aligned with the authoritarian profile. Authoritarians are conscientious about completing their work and prefer working in a role-specific and predictable work atmosphere. They are motivated by dependable routines, clearly defined roles, and uniformed guidelines.

   Eighth grade science PLC: Collectivist (Strong Group, Weak Grid). As I observed the eighth grade science PLC meeting, the main themes were the teachersø effective collaboration with one another and their excitement for the upcoming lessons and activities they were planning for their students. The teachers displayed good rapport with each another and seemed comfortable collaborating. The assistant principal asked probing questions from time to time; however, the main facilitators of the meeting were the teachers. Questions were asked by the assistant principal regarding the experience the teachers had with instructional rounds. I observed a detailed conversation on instructional strategies; however, no discussion on student assessment data. This professional learning community demonstrated a strong group and weak grid characteristics. At Calvary Middle School, Ms. Williams worked to build a positive school culture. On this particular observation day, teachers were encouraged to wear ÷School Spiritö shirts and apparel. Each member of the eighth grade science PLC was wearing a school shirt, an outward sign of their support and solidarity of the school. Both teachers displayed characteristics aligned with the egalitarian profile. Throughout the meeting, the principal gave both teachers suggestions to improve instruction. His approach was one of suggesting not demanding or giving a directive. When the assistant principal asked about the flipped classroom concept, he gave the teachers the freedom and autonomy to make the decision themselves: õDo you think that is something you

would try in your own classroomö (Observation, December 6, 2019). Each member of this PLC group had a role and seemed to find comfort in the group dynamic. Each memberøs personality played a role in the culture of the group as well. Though Amy, a first year teacher, had less experience in the classroom and with the professional learning community framework, she was more assertive throughout the meeting. She was the main facilitator in the meeting, sharing instructional strategies and instigating the conversation.

   Eighth grade math PLC: Corporate (Strong Group, Strong Grid). In observing the eighth grade math PLC, emerging themes were the principaløs facilitation of the meeting and her in-depth analysis of their studentsø achievement. Ms. Williams stated, õIøm extremely fortunate to have experienced assistant principals, who understand the PLC framework and effectively communicate their knowledge to our teachersö (Interview, December 19, 2019). The assistant principal was the main facilitator and leader for this PLC group. This assistant principal had been employed with the school district more than 10 years and had a thorough understanding of the PLC framework and data analysis in particular. She initiated the collaboration and was asking specific questions to each teacher regarding curriculum mapping and student assessment data. The assistant principal demonstrated a confident and determined persona throughout the meeting. This professional learning community demonstrated strong group and strong grid characteristics. This PLC group would be identified in the corporate quadrant of grid and group typology. Each member displayed a strong allegiance to the group and the groupøs interests seemed prioritized over individual needs. The assistant principal and teachers demonstrated characteristics aligned with the hierarch profile.

Summary
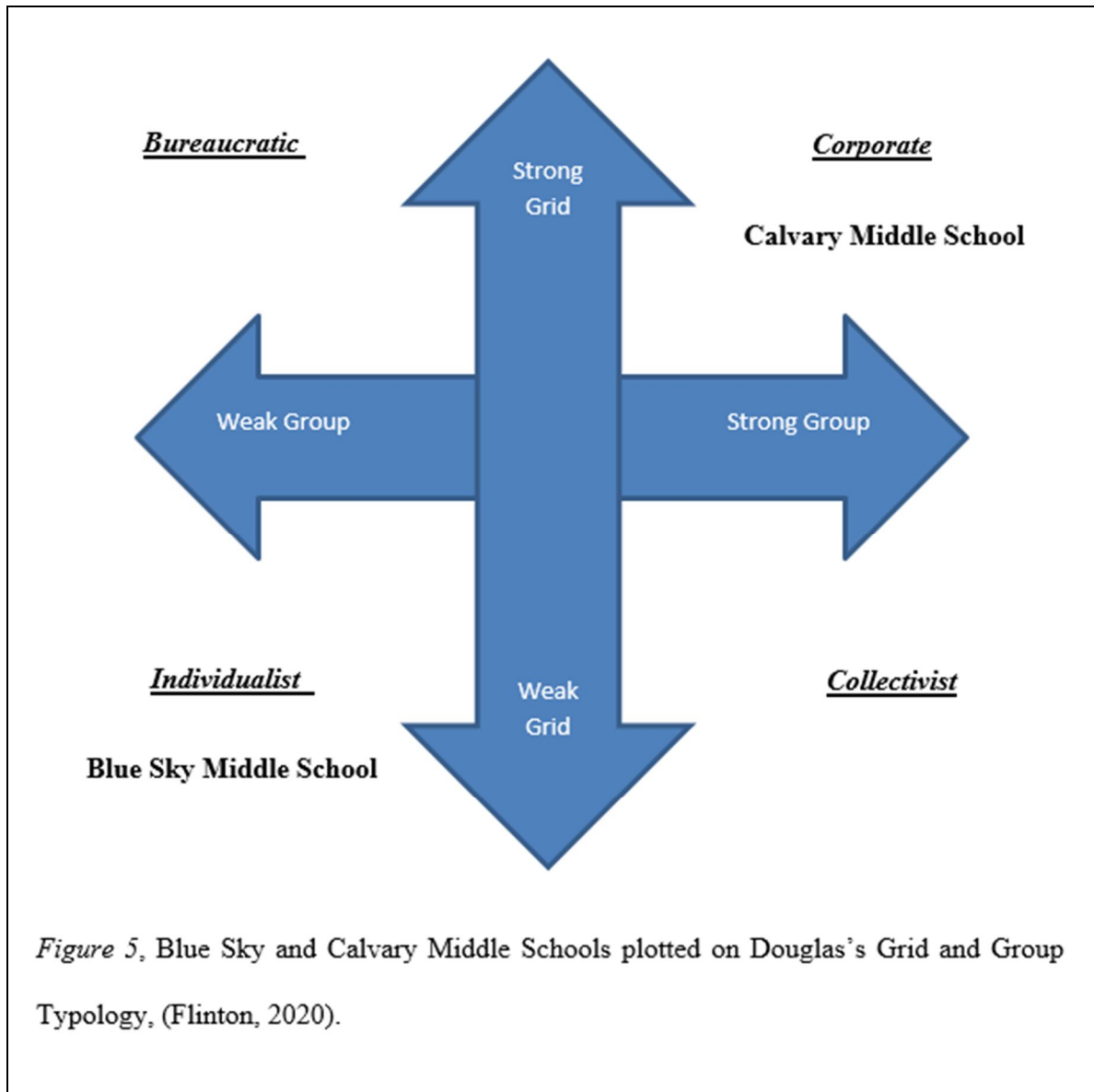
Figure 5, Blue Sky and Calvary Middle Schools plotted on Douglas's Grid and Group Typology, (Flinton, 2020).

Chapter V analyzes how teachersø and principalsø roles inhibit or promote the success of each professional learning community through the lens of cultural theory. Each school context and professional learning community team was viewed through Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Grid and Group Typology and placed within the appropriate quadrant. Figure 5 illustrates the placement of Blue Sky Middle School and Calvary Middle School on the grid and group continuum. In observing professional learning community meetings and interviewing participants within Blue

Sky's environment, emerging themes were identified that placed Blue Sky in the individualist quadrant. Figure 6 illustrates the placement on the grid and group continuum of each PLC observed in this study.

Bureaucratic

Blue Sky: Eighth Grade Level PLC

Corporate

Calvary: Seventh Grade Math PLC
Seventh Grade English PLC
Eighth Grade Math PLC

Strong Grid

Weak Group

Strong Group

Individualist

Blue Sky: Sixth Grade Level PLC
Blue Sky: Eighth Grade Science PLC

Weak Grid

Collectivist

Calvary: Eighth Grade Science PLC
Blue Sky: Eighth Grade English PLC

Figure 6, Blue Sky and Calvary PLCs plotted on Douglas's (1982, 1986) Grid and Group Typology, (Flinton, 2020).

Within Blue Sky's environment, the eighth grade English PLC demonstrated themes aligned with the collectivist quadrant, the eighth grade science and sixth grade level PLC

demonstrated themes aligned with the individualist quadrant, and the eighth grade level PLC was aligned with the bureaucratic quadrant. In analyzing Blue Sky⌀s PLCs, three PLC teams demonstrated weak-group characteristics; however, the eighth grade English PLC, demonstrated strong- group characteristics. This may be attributed to the veteran team members of the group. Both members were veteran teachers at Blue Sky and had experienced extensive PLC professional development training. They both demonstrated an intrinsic motivation in their approach toward the PLC process. Calvary demonstrated characteristics of a strong group and strong grid, placing the school context in the corporate quadrant. Within Calvary⌀s environment, the eighth grade science PLC displayed characteristics aligned with the collectivist quadrant. The additional PLCs observed, seventh grade math, seventh grade English and eighth grade science, demonstrated strong group and strong grid characteristics placing them in the corporate quadrant of Douglas⌀s (1982, 1986) Grid and Group Typology. Chapter VI concludes the study with findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research in supporting the educational practices of professional learning communities.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was organized in six chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction to the study with major components including the purpose of the study, the statement of the problem and the identification of three research questions. Chapter II provided an in depth review of the literature that assists in understanding the research topic. Chapter II reviewed literature that involved (a) professional learning communities, (b) challenges within professional learning communities, and (c) Mary Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory. Chapter III provided a description of the research methods used throughout the study. Chapter IV presented all data, including interviews, observations and field notes in detail. Chapter V analyzed the data through the grid and group typology of culture. Chapter VI concludes the study with findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research in supporting the educational practices of professional learning communities.

Findings

The purpose of this study was through cultural theory, to explore principalsø and teachersøroles in professional learning communities in two selected school contexts. The following research questions guided the study:

1. In each school studied, how is the professional learning community structured?

    a. What are the teachersøroles in the PLC?

    b. What is the principaløs role in the PLC?

2. How do principal and teacher roles in the PLC interrelate with cultures of each school?

3. How does Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory explain the above?

Research Question One: In each school studied, how is the professional learning community structured?

The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift, from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning, has profound implications for schools (DuFour, 2004). As DuFour outlines, this shift from a focus on teaching to the focus on learning, is a major paradigm shift for all educators introduced to the PLC model. Specifically, professional learning communities have shown to increase teachersøpersonal, interpersonal, and organizational capacities and their belief of executing instructional strategies to ensure every student is achieving academic progress (Pancucci, 2008).

This simple philosophy shift makes all the difference for student achievement. Louis and Kruse (1995) maintain that a core characteristic of professional learning communities is an unwavering focus on student learning and collaboration. Both Blue Sky and Calvary administration, recognize the importance of professional collaboration within their environments. However, the PLC structure and implementation was different in both school contexts.

School Contexts. In observing Blue Sky Middle School, the professional learning community was structured to provide time for teachers and administrators to collaborate professionally on a weekly schedule. Teachers at Blue Sky had an opportunity to meet with their colleagues to discuss the four main PLC questions outlined by DuFour (2004).

1. What do we want our students to learn?
2. How will we know if students learned curriculum outcomes?
3. What will we do when students do not learn objectives?
4. How do we provide enrichment opportunities to our students?

These questions pertain to the school curriculum, assessments, interventions and enrichment opportunities for students. Teachers also discussed instructional strategies, analyze

student assessment data, and create plans for students in need of remediation. At Blue Sky, a full-time instructional coach was employed to assist and facilitate each PLC meeting. Administrators were also scheduled to attend each PLC meeting. Within Calvary's school environment, a collaborative school culture was modeled and reinforced by the administrative team. Ms. Williams and her assistant principals were very well versed and experienced in the professional learning community framework. Each administrator had completed extensive PLC training and understood their PLC role within Calvary's school environment. Calvary scheduled PLC meetings twice a week, one meeting as a grade level and one subject area meeting. PLC meetings are opportunities for teachers to discuss curriculum and teaching strategies. It was the expectation at Calvary that teachers teach the same topics and create common formative assessments. An assistant principal stated, "The district likes to micro- manage each site and expects us to be aligned with their curriculum map" (Observation, December 6, 2019). The purpose of common formative assessments was for teachers to be able to discuss their teaching strengths and weaknesses. This collaborative culture was reinforced and modeled by site and district administration. Melody stated, "I think the school district is very hands on, very. But I think that it is what the kids actually need. So since they have the kid's best interest in mind, it doesn't bother me at all" (Interview, December 13, 2019).

Question 1a: teachers' roles. At Blue Sky, new teachers were trained in the overall PLC model and framework. Though many teachers to Blue Sky were new to the building, a core group of veteran teachers had extensive training in the PLC model and served as PLC leaders and mentors to other faculty members. Teachers were expected to align daily lessons with the state curriculum standards and prepare their students for district mandated quarterly benchmark assessments. Student test data were reviewed and each school site and subject area were compared to other school sites within the district. Teachers were expected and encouraged to attend PLC meetings and collaborate with their colleagues. This message was reinforced by Mr. Jones throughout the school environment. As Mr. Jones stated,

Collaboration is the key with PLCs. There's always sharing of data, there's sharing of skill, there's sharing of the way that students are responding to their instruction, and they are also developing remediation strategies. So, that's the expectation of teachers and we make adjustments along the way. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

At Calvary, the teachers' roles were to be receptive and embrace the collaborative culture. Ms. Williams, Calvary's principal, stated,

It's a time to work together, and their role is to just work together and to know that we don't always have to agree. We don't always have to teach the exact same things, in the exact same manner. But we need to be on the same page with what the standards are that we are teaching. That's the culture we have built. We are a team. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

In speaking with teachers at Calvary, this culture of collaboration was referenced many times. Melody stated, "In this collaborative culture it feels like a family. I view my role as more of a leader since I have had experience with PLCs and my partner has not" (Interview, December 13, 2019). The PLC cultural shift from focused strictly on teaching to ensuring every student is learning was evident at Calvary. Conversations revolved around student assessment data, ideas for student interventions, curriculum alignment within the subject area, and searching for new strategies to increase student achievement and progress. This collaborative culture revolved around the goal of increasing teachers' collective efficacy within the school environment:

I feel that my role is to understand how my students learn so that when I'm organizing and planning lessons around the standards. I can try to proactively see where they might have difficulty to make sure that when I'm explaining things or teaching them, that I'm giving them the space to be confused and then find clarity. (Amy, interview, December 18, 2019)

Question 1b: principal's role. Each member of the administrative team at Blue Sky Middle School had a specific role within the PLC framework. Each member had an assigned core

subject and was expected to meet with their group during the scheduled meetings. When Mr. Jones was asked to describe his role in the professional learning community, he stated, "An administrator's role is to be a source of support. But it's not an administrator's role, for a well-oiled PLC, to interfere that much. You function as a coach. You don't function as a micromanager" (Interview, December 19, 2019). As a first year principal, Mr. Jones recognized the challenges in sustaining an effective PLC and consistently worked with his administrative team to ensure teachers felt supported with the PLC framework:

> I make sure that my assistant principals are visiting those PLCs. I'm not going to lie. It gets busy. There are times where the day kind of takes a life of its own and we are unable to attend the meetings. What's really frustrating is substitute teachers cancelling at the last minute. This causes a teacher, it might be on a PLC day, to cover that hour or during their PLC time—that messes up the PLCs. (Jones, interview, December 19, 2019)

In this school context, administrators worked with the instructional coach and teachers to align daily lesson plans with district curriculum pacing guides, create common formative assessments, and disaggregate student testing data. Mr. Jones stated,

> It's all about making sure that you are adapting to the students that you serve, you are adapting to your collecting data, you're collecting what works and what doesn't work, you're figuring out a way of adjusting it, you have those four questions. How do we instruct them? What do we do if they don't get it? What do we do if they do get it? How do we remediate and enrich? So the remediation and enrichment piece has always been a speedbump at every school that I've been. (Interview, December 19, 2019)

As the Blue Sky principal, Mr. Jones worked to build a collaborative school culture that is conducive to his faculty's collective efficacy. As Mr. Jones stated,

> Why would you want to be in the classroom by yourself not sharing ideas? Not being willing to be collaborative or collegial with the rest of your folks that you're on a team

with or with the rest of your building because I see this place as a family. (Interview,

December 19, 2019)

Each member of the administrative team at Calvary Middle School had a specific role

within the PLC framework. Each member had an assigned core subject and was expected to meet

with their group during the scheduled meetings. When Ms. Williams was asked to describe her

role in the professional learning community, she stated,

Ideally, I don't like to do a whole lot of talking in our PLC meetings. This isn't about me.

I'm just there for support. And so I try to offer ideas here and there. I've had to refocus

groups because it is easier for them to just get into planning. I love the planning, but we

need to make sure we're specific as to what skills we are hitting and why. So my role is

to support and then just to refocus the group when I need to. (Interview, December 19,

2019)

The administrative team met every Monday to discuss each PLC group and determine each

team's placement in the instructional cycle. Also, they discussed specific groups that may need

additional support and guidance from administration. In describing her PLC expectations for her

faculty, Ms. Williams stated,

The main message coming from me to all of my PLC teams is, it's non-negotiable. We

don't miss PLCs unless your absent or covering a class. Other than that, we are in the

conference room. We are not asking them to do anything that we're not sitting there

doing with them. And they know, it's what we do. (Williams, interview, December 19,

2019)

At Calvary, this message of PLC participation and accountability was reinforced and modeled by

the administrative team.

Research Question Two: How do principals and teachers roles in the PLC interrelate with cultures of each school?

      School Sites. Within the Blue Sky school environment, Mr. Jones was working to create a school culture that embraced and cultivated professional collaboration. In being a first year principal, this task was an on-going process and took intentional action each school day. Blue Sky had experienced major teacher and administrator turnover within the last five years. This inconsistency of leadership and new personnel, had created a weak group dynamic.

      This constant change within the staff created a lack of commitment by teachers to the larger social unit. Teacher turnover undermines social cohesion and sustained teacher collaboration in the schools (Talbert, 2011). As a first year principal, Mr. Jones was working to build the collegiality within the school context; however, changing a school culture takes time and strategic planning. Though teachers were encouraged to attend PLC meetings and engage in meaningful collaboration, administrative participation and attendance was lacking. Mr. Jones displayed a desire to create a high functioning professional learning community within Blue Sky; however, his absence from PLC meetings negatively affected the collaborative culture.

      Fullan (2001) suggested that successful implementation of any program consists of 25% having the right idea or vision and 75% implementing the right processes. If principals and other school leaders are not knowledgeable and comfortable with the components of a PLC prior to implementation, then the process with be ineffective and unsuccessful. As DuFour (2004) discusses, student data should be an integral piece to the professional learning community culture. Analyzing the data on a consistent basis and then being purposeful in developing a plan for improvement, is vital in the overall PLC process. This two-fold plan was observed in some but not all of the PLCs in Blue Sky.

      Calvary's culture had been well established by Ms. Williams and all school members understood the priority PLC time had within the school context. As Ms. Williams reiterated, PLC time is õnon-negotiable.ö The PLC framework had been communicated and modeled to all

faculty members and Calvary displayed strong group characteristics. As Abrego and Pankake (2006) stated, õA school focused on supportive and shared leadership provides opportunities for their teachers to be involved in the decision-making process at the district and campus levels through various mediaö (p. 47). This may include campus and district level committee assignments. Ms. Williams created many opportunities for shared leadership within Calvaryøs environment, including committees and other leadership activities in which teachers were involved. This culture of shared leadership was evident in PLC meetings without administrators. Teachers were focused on meaningful conversations and tasks even without direct supervision from administrators.

Research Question Three: How does Douglas's (1982) Cultural Theory explain the above?

Grid and Group Typology. In viewing both school contexts through the lens of Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory, this study showed Blue Sky displayed characteristics aligned with a weak grid and weak group identification. Many factors contributed to this identification, including high teacher and administrative turnover, inconsistent teacher accountability, and minimal shared leadership throughout the school context. During most PLC meetings observed, group members were not engaged in strong collaborative discussions, focused directly on student learning. In comparison, Calvary Middle School demonstrated a strong group and strong grid dynamic within the school environment. Contributing factors included intentional activities by the principal, Ms. Williams, to increase the relational capacity with her faculty, resources provided to PLC members to assist in data analysis and planning, and modeling of expected behaviors and outcomes within PLC meetings. This resulted in PLC members staying on task and productive during PLC meetings even without direct administrative attendance and immediate feedback. Within Calvaryøs school context, teachers seemed empowered and intrinsically motivated to stay on task throughout PLC meetings.

Conclusions

The following conclusions pertain to the schools under study and are not meant to be generalized to broad populations. Any transferability of findings and conclusions to other contexts depend on the likeness of those contexts with the schools in this study. As noted in Chapter I and II, the professional learning community framework is a viable school reform that can increase student achievement and teachers' collective efficacy. However, successful implementation of this model is contingent on many factors and requires consistent training and leadership for sustainability. As Saunders, Goldberg and Gallimore (2009) stated, "Simply providing classroom teachers time to collaborate, had no effect on teacher and student learning unless their meetings were focused on the right work" (p.43). The findings from this study indicate there are three main factors needed for the viable implementation and sustainability of a professional learning community.

Professional Learning Communities Viability

The findings from this study reinforce three main factors that contribute to the successful implementation of a professional learning community in a school context. These factors consist of an elevated relational capacity between administrators and teachers, consistent and reoccurring professional development for PLC members, and leaders willing to hold PLC members accountable throughout the process.

Relational Capacity. The relational capacity is the level of trust and safety two people have with each other. In a school context, the relational capacity between principals and teachers is an indicator of the school culture. The influence a principal has on teachers is directly related to the degree of relational capacity between the two individuals. Without relational capacity, a principal has little to no influence over a teacher's thoughts or actions. And without influence, new school initiatives may not be viewed favorably by faculty members. Blue Sky and Calvary had principals that were cognizant of the importance of building the relational capacity within their faculties. Both school sites had experienced recent teacher turnover, causing a decline in

PLC continuity within the school environments. Ms. Williams had seven years of experience in Calvary's environment; however, Mr. Jones was in his first year as a head principal at Blue Sky. A major factor in building the relational capacity with teachers and colleagues is time. Constant personnel turnover makes this challenging for administrators and teachers alike.

Professional Development. To ensure each PLC group is focused on appropriate and meaningful tasks, district and school site administration must provide all PLC members in- depth training on the professional learning community model. This training should be focused on the student learning cycle and provide the framework for the successful implementation of the system-wide school improvement plan. The professional development training needs to be reoccurring for new teachers as well as veteran teachers within the school environment. Both school sites in this study have experienced major turnover within their staffs and would benefit from frequent training and review of the PLC model. Sandstone provides initial training for newly hired teachers in their New Teacher Academy. This opportunity gives them a basic foundation of the professional learning community model and communicates the expectation of professional growth and student progress from the district level.

Leadership. Leadership is important for the successful implementation of new initiatives in any organization, including school environments. With this being said, school principals are charged with the task of building the leadership capacity within teachers and other administrators within the environment. This shared leadership can assist in sustaining a purposeful and viable professional learning community. Abrego and Pankake (2011) posited the following five leadership responsibilities necessary for the successful implementation of a professional learning community: (a) culture, the ability to foster shared beliefs and a sense of community; (b) focus, the ability to establish clear goals and keep these goals at the forefront of the school's attention; (c) communication, ability to develop strong lines of communication with teachers and students; (d) outreach, advocating and being a spokesperson for the school to all stakeholders; and (e) affirmation, the ability to recognize and celebrate school accomplishments and acknowledging

school failures. Each of these leadership responsibilities have been shown to support the professional learning community model.

In observing Blue Sky and Calvary, situations occurred that prevented an administrator to be present during certain PLC meetings. Some reasons included personal leave from school, attending to student discipline issues, and attending mandatory district-level meetings. Without this accountability, I witnessed a less structured environment in most of the meetings. Recognizing these situations may arise during the school day, site leaders must cultivate a shared leadership model throughout the school context. Equipping teacher leaders within the PLC framework is important to the sustainability of the professional learning community. As principals work toward building shared leadership, they should continue to be visible and participate in PLC meetings. This professional collaboration must include administrators and teachers working together to analyze student data, create plans for remediation, and discussing instructional strategies.

Implications

The findings from this study have implications for research, theory and practice. Examples of these implications are described below.

Implications for Research

The professional learning community (PLC) can be an effective system-wide school improvement model (Dufour et al., 2005; Saphier, 2005; Schmoker, 2005). The PLC model encourages purposeful collaboration among the administrators and teachers and provides the conditions necessary for the synergy that drives school improvement. Improved student achievement is one instance where research has demonstrated that educators who work collaboratively produce an effect on student results that is greater than the sum of individual teacher effort (Dufour & Marzano, 2011; Fullan, 2005; Saphier, 2005). Findings of this study confirmed findings from previous research regarding the roles of principals and teachers in PLCs. Specifically, how professional collaboration will improve schools only when PLC members are

relentlessly focused on student learning (Carroll, 2010; Chenoweth, 2009; Hattie, 2009). Findings of this study also confirmed the importance of shared leadership within school contexts. To cultivate an effective professional learning community, principals must also foster shared leadership within the collaborative teams. Without effective leadership at the team level, the collaborative process may shift away from issues most critical to student learning (Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009).

Using Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory, as the theoretical framework for this study expanded the research base to include the roles of teachers and principals within professional learning communities. Findings revealed professional learning communities and PLC members aligned with weak group and weak grid characteristics inhibited the progress and sustainability of the PLC. However, professional learning communities and PLC members aligned with strong group and strong grid characteristics promoted the PLC success.

Implications for Theory

This study contributed to cultural theory (Douglas, 1982, 1986) by focusing on the characteristics of the cultural norms within two school contexts. Specifically, focusing on the roles of principals and teachers within professional learning communities and how their roles inhibit or promote the success of the educational practice. This study showed how cultural theory can be useful in explaining the characteristics of principal and teacher roles within a professional learning community. In using Douglasøs (1982, 1986) grid and group typology as a theoretical lens, characteristics of successful professional learning communities were identified and placed in the appropriate quadrants. Future research studies could identify and implement a different theoretical framework to possibly expand the research for professional learning communities in school contexts.

Implications for Practice

This study was undertaken because of three concerns: (1) a lack of research and knowledge outlining how Mary Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory and culture affect PLCs,

(2) not all school contexts promote positive professional learning communities characteristics (3) and not every educational leader is equipped with the skills and training to successfully implement and sustain system-wide school improvement. Results of this study add to the existing research on PLCs with an emphasis on the roles of principals and teachers in promoting or inhibiting a collaborative school culture. Findings from this study can assist district leaders, site leaders and school teachers with the implementation and sustainability of successful professional learning communities.

District Leaders. District leaders should recognize their role in the successful implementation of a professional learning community. As Fullan (2000, 2006) contended, one important barrier to implementing PLCs in schools lies in the failure to consider the context at all three levels of the system- schools, districts, and provincial departments of education. Without the appropriate focus by district leadership, site leadership will struggle with the sustainability of the PLC model. District leaders must provide professional development opportunities and training to all members of the professional learning community. Resources, trainings and consistent support are all important variables to the on-going success of the professional learning community. Sandstone had implemented a program, *New Teacher Academy*, to provide professional development to all new teachers within the school district. The professional learning community framework was discussed during this training; however, additional PLC training throughout the school year, would be beneficial in sustaining a collaborative culture throughout the school district.

Site Leaders. Principals must be cognizant of their role within the PLC and work toward providing teachers with the training, resources and guidance within the school context. The findings of this study show building the relational capacity within the faculty, providing meaningful professional training to PLC members, cultivating a shared leadership culture, and communicating expectations and holding each member accountable throughout the collaborative process are important tasks for each principal. As principals focus on these tasks, system-wide

school improvement and the educational practices of a successful professional learning community will increase.

School Teachers. The findings from this research study can inform teachers on the characteristics of productive and successful professional learning communities and provide insight on how Mary Douglasøs (1982. 1986) Cultural Theory describes these characteristics and personality profiles. Being self- aware of these profiles may influence teachers to embrace characteristics aligned with a successful and productive professional learning community. Ultimately, professional learning communities are created to increase the collective efficacy of the PLC members and increase the academic achievement of all students. In recognizing the school culture, teachers can become more intrinsically motivated and make the necessary changes for professional growth. As Barth (2006) posited,

> Relationships among the adults within a school has a greater influence on the character and quality of that school and on student accomplishment than anything elseí The relationships among the educators in the school define all relationships within the schooløs culture. (p. 8)

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Recommendations for Future Research

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The following recommendations for future research are provided as possible extensions of this research study.

School Contexts

This study was conducted in two middle schools and used Mary Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory. The researcher observed professional learning community meetings and interviewed two veteran teachers, one beginning teacher and one lead principal in each school context. Each school context and participant had experienced PLC professional development training from the site and district level. For future research studies, researchers could focus on elementary school sites and also conduct research at the district level, observing and interviewing central office administrators and school board members. Also, future researchers could use survey

tools to assist in classifying units of analysis into grid and group categories. Specifically, the Cultural Context Assessment Tool (Harris, 2015) and the Cultural Preference Assessment Tool (Harris, 2015), could assist researchers in collecting additional data for future research studies.

Study Population

Both Calvary and Blue Sky Middle Schools, served a low socio-economic student population. This was evident with both schools receiving federal Title I funding. Within Blue Sky's environment, 75% of the student population qualified for free and/or reduced child nutrition program which includes breakfast and lunch. Also, 93% of Calvary's student population qualified for free and/or reduced child nutrition program which includes breakfast and lunch. Future researchers could study more affluent school contexts compared to a lower socio-economic student population. Focusing on a more affluent study population, may provide researchers a different school culture. Also, future research studies could expand the number of school sites studied, professional learning community meetings observed, and participants interviewed.

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Summary

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This study was organized in six chapters. Chapter I provided an introduction to the study with major components including the purpose of the study, the statement of the problem and the identification of three research questions. Chapter II provided an in depth review of the literature that will assist in understanding the research topic. Chapter III provided a description of the research methods used throughout the study. Chapter IV presented all data, including interviews, observations and field notes in detail. Chapter V analyzed the data through the grid and group typology of culture. Chapter VI concluded the study with interpretations and recommendations for future research in supporting the educational practices of professional learning communities.

Chapter I

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are powerful models designed to promote system-wide school improvement. While PLCs are designed to promote system-wide school

improvement, research indicated that these goals are accomplished in some instances (DuFour et al., 2005; Saphier, 2005; Schmoker, 2005), and not accomplished in others (Carroll, 2010; Chenowith, 2009; Fullan, 2007; Hattie, 2009; Sims & Penny, 2015; Supovitz & Christman, 2003; Talbert, 2011). One way to explain these discrepancies is through cultural theory, which posits that cultural membersøroles and the rules associated with those roles are important variables in contextual practices and interactions (Douglas, 1995; Giles-Sims & Lockhart, 2005; Harris, 2005). For example, teachersø and principalsøroles may inhibit or promote the success of PLCs in a given school environment. (Fullan, 2006; Hord, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003).

The purpose of this study was through cultural theory, to explore principalsø and teachersøroles in professional learning communities in two selected school contexts. Constructionism was the epistemological perspective informing this study. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as õthe view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, developed and transmitted within an essentially social contextö (p.42). In relation to this study, knowledge will be constructed by observing and interacting with teachers and principals within the professional learning community. This study used naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993), which allows the researcher to understand the everyday life of the people involved in the educational environment. This study featured close interactions with human subjects and their perceptions of specific situations, processes, and occurrences. This study used Douglasøs (1982, 1986) grid and group typology, also referred to as Cultural Theory (CT). Grid and group typology (Douglas, 1982) was originally used in cultural anthropology in order to understand the dynamics of culture and social changes.

Chapter II

The purpose of Chapter II was to present a synthesis of research and literature. The goals of the review were: (a) to describe how a professional learning community framework can be instrumental in system-wide school improvement, (b) to illustrate the enhanced importance of

school culture, and (c) to express the need for the present study. Chapter II also presented research on characteristics of the professional learning community framework, challenges with the sustainability of professional learning communities, and a thorough description of Mary Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory. Throughout Chapter II, research studies focused on Douglasøs (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory and the grid and group continuum, were discussed and research findings were presented.

Chapter III

The purpose of Chapter III was to outline the methodological approach used to collect, analyze and code data for the study and explain basic features of naturalistic inquiry. This study used naturalistic inquiry (Erlandson et al., 1993), which allows the researcher to understand the everyday life of the people involved in the professional learning community. This study featured interactions with human subjects and their perceptions of specific situations, processes, and occurrences. Analysis of these experiences and perceptions were completed to form a description of a specific situational phenomenon, or a case study. This study included the following methods of data collection: principal and teacher interviews, document and artifact analysis, and participant observations with the aim of corroborating emergent facts or phenomenon. Naturalistic inquiry was chosen to provide this holistic picture of what the impact was on the lives of the teachers, school culture, and principals, within each school context.

Chapter IV

The purpose of Chapter IV was to present all data, including interviews, observations and field notes in detail. Chapter IV presented data from professional learning community meetings and interviews from each school context. The researcher observed four PLC meetings, interviewed two veteran teachers, one beginning teacher and the head principal in each school context. Descriptions of each PLC meeting was presented and each interview was transcribed and coded for emerging themes. Detailed descriptions of the school district, Sandstone, each school context, Blue Sky and Calvary, and each participant were presented throughout Chapter IV.

Chapter V

The purpose of Chapter V was to present an analysis of all data through the theoretical framework of Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory. Each school context and professional learning community meeting was viewed through the lens of cultural theory and characteristics were identified and placed within the quadrants of the grid and group typology. Calvary demonstrated characteristics that support a strong group and strong grid classification, ultimately placing them in the corporate quadrant on the grid and group continuum. In observing professional learning community meetings and interviewing participants within Blue Sky's environment, emerging themes were identified that placed Blue Sky in the individualist quadrant on the grid and group continuum. Calvary Middle School demonstrated strong group and strong grid characteristics aligned with the corporate cell in Douglas's (1982, 1986) grid and group framework.

Chapter VI

Chapter VI concludes this study with findings, implications, conclusions and recommendations for future research in supporting the educational practices of professional learning communities. The findings from this study point to three factors needed for the successful implementation of a professional learning community in a school context. These factors consist of an elevated relational capacity between administrators and teachers, consistent and reoccurring professional development for PLC members, and leaders willing to hold PLC members accountable throughout the process. In using Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory as the theoretical framework for this research, teachers' and principals' roles were identified and characteristics of both school contexts were placed on the grid and group continuum.

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Researcher Comments

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In an attempt to explore, through cultural theory, the roles of teachers and principals within professional learning communities, the findings of this study reinforce previous research on the viability of PLCs. Findings from this study show the importance of an elevated relational

capacity between administrators and teachers, consistent and reoccurring professional development for PLC members, and leaders willing to hold PLC members accountable throughout the process. President Theodore Roosevelt (1904) stated, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." This can be true in any organization, including school contexts. School leaders must be purposeful in cultivating the relational capacity within their school environments to perpetuate teachers' receptivity to school initiatives and reforms (i.e., professional learning communities). Purposeful and consistent professional development is also recommended for ongoing sustainability of an effective professional learning community, especially for school environments that have high teacher and administrator turnover. School leaders must be cognizant of the overall morale of their teachers and provide appropriate training for their instructional success. Equipping PLC members with appropriate training, resources, and instructional strategies, will assist in their overall empowerment. Lastly, school leaders should focus on cultivating shared leadership within their school environments. In cultivating shared leadership within a school environment, a culture of accountability should be modeled and reinforced by district and site leadership.

In using Douglas's (1982, 1986) Cultural Theory as the theoretical framework, I was able to place each PLC and school context on the grid and group continuum. This was beneficial in identifying characteristics aligned with successful educational practices within professional learning communities. The principals' and teachers' roles can promote or inhibit the system-wide educational practices, specifically within professional learning communities. With this being said, I believe the sustainability of an effective professional learning community involves principals and teachers trusting the collaborative process and embracing the challenges within PLCs. I believe the rise or fall of the professional learning community concept depends on the collective capacity, commitment, and persistence of the educators in a given school context. With the findings from this research study, principals, teachers, and school communities have additional information for the implementation and sustainability of successful educational practices within

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professional learning communities. Ultimately, increasing the collective efficacy of PLC

members and ensuring the academic progress of every student.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Informed Consent

The Role of Principal and Teacher Leadership within Professional Learning Communities: A Cultural Theory Perspective

Investigator: Matthew Flinton, Doctoral Candidate, Oklahoma State University

Purpose:

You are being invited to participate in a study on the roles of principal and teacher leadership within professional learning communities. The purpose of this study is through cultural theory, to explore principals' and teachers' roles in professional learning communities in selected school contexts. Participants will be asked to share their insights regarding the roles of principals and teachers within the professional learning community and the overall PLC structure for their school environment.

Procedures:

As a participant in this study, you have been purposefully selected to participate in an interview, where you will be asked questions regarding general information about yourself and your role within your school's professional learning community. The interview should take approximately 45 minutes and will be conducted in the location of your choice. I will record the interview on my IPhone so that I can later transcribe the interview. I will provide a copy of the transcribed interview to you so that you can verify the accuracy and content of the interview.

Risks of Participation:

There are no known risks associated with this study which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

Benefits:

There are no direct benefits to you. The results of this study will inform university programs, administrators, teachers and how principal and teacher roles support or inhibit the educational practices of a professional learning community.

Confidentiality:

The records and results of this study will be kept private and confidential. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Pseudonyms will be assigned to all participants in the study. Consent forms will be kept separate from all other documents. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. It is possible that the consent process and data collection will be observed by research oversight staff responsible for safeguarding the rights and wellbeing of people what participate in research. Interviews will be recorded on my IPhone, and data files will be transferred to a flash drive that will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Immediately following the interview, all transcriptions will be completed by the researcher to ensure maximum

confidentiality. As soon as transcription is complete, the data files will be permanently removed from my IPhone. Data will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed.

Compensation:

No compensation will be provided for participation in this research study.

Contacts:

If you have any questions about this study, please contact:

Matthew Flinton	Dr. Ed Harris, Advisor	IRB
Doctoral Candidate	Oklahoma State University	Oklahoma State Univ.
8201 NW 83rd St.	College of Education	223 Scott Hall
Oklahoma City, OK 73132	308 Willard Hall	Stillwater, OK 74078
(405)708-8482	Stillwater, OK 74078	(405) 744-3377
matthew.flinton@okstate.edu	(405)744-7932	irb@okstate.edu
	ed.harris@okstate.edu	

Participant Rights:

Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose to discontinue participation at any time with no risk or penalty.

Signatures:

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form has been given to me.

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Signature of Participant   Date

I certify that I have explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

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Signature of Researcher   Date

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date:	11/07/2019
Application Number:	ED-19-148
Proposal Title:	The Role of Principal And Teacher Leadership Within Professional Learning Communities: A Cultural Theory Perspective.
Principal Investigator:	Matthew Flinton
Co-Investigator(s):	
Faculty Adviser:	Ed Harris
Project Coordinator:	
Research Assistant(s):	
Processed as:	Exempt
Exempt Category:	

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in 45CFR46.

This study meets criteria in the Revised Common Rule, as well as, one or more of the circumstances for which <u>continuing review is not required.</u> As Principal Investigator of this research, you will be required to submit a status report to the IRB triennially.

The final versions of any recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are available for download from IRBManager. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:
1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be approved by the IRB. Protocol modifications requiring approval may include changes to the title, PI, adviser, other research personnel, funding status or sponsor, subject population composition or size, recruitment, inclusion/exclusion criteria, research site, research procedures and consent/assent process or forms.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any unanticipated and/or adverse events to the IRB Office promptly.
4. Notify the IRB office when your research project is complete or when you are no longer affiliated with Oklahoma State University.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact the IRB Office at 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.

Sincerely,
Oklahoma State University IRB

APPENDIX C

Letter of Introduction

(letter to be sent via email to each middle school site)

To Middle School Staff:

My name is Matthew Flinton. I am a doctoral student at Oklahoma State University, pursuing a degree in School Administration. I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree, and your site has been selected for my study. I have been in public education for 21 years and have experience as a teacher, school principal, and central office administrator.

I am conducting a case study to better understand the roles of principals and teachers in a professional learning community (PLC). The purpose of this study is through cultural theory, to explore principals' and teachers' roles in a professional learning community in selected school contexts. The resulting analysis should be insightful to school administrators and others in the education community.

I have been granted access to _____Middle School by the superintendent, Dr. Superintendent, and the principal of your school. I will be present at the school throughout this semester and will attend a few PLC meetings. In the following weeks, I will be seeking assistance of teachers with one to three years of experience as well as veteran teachers with many years of experience to agree to a 30 to 45 minute interview. The data collected from the interviews will be kept strictly confidential. If you decide to participate in this research, your identity and responses will not be revealed to the principal, or even in my dissertation. The principal will have no knowledge of who has agreed to be interviewed.

If you have any additional questions regarding this study, please respond to this email or call at 405.708.8482.

Respectfully,

Matthew Flinton

Approved: 11/07/2019
Protocol #: ED-19-148

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APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions

Teacher interview questions consisted of the following:

- Describe your school environment.

- Briefly describe a typical professional learning community meeting.

- Describe your principal's role in the professional learning community?

- Describe your role in the professional learning community?

- What kind of PLC activities does your principal participate in?

- How does your school principal support a professional learning community?

Principal interview questions consisted of the following:

- Describe your school environment.

- Briefly describe a typical professional learning community meeting.

- Describe your role in the professional learning community?

- Describe the teachers' roles in the professional learning community?

- What kinds of PLC activities do you participate in?

- How do you support and cultivate the professional learning community?

APPENDIX E

Demographic Information

Name: _____

Cell Phone: _____ Classroom Phone: _____

Email Address: _____

Preferred method of contact: (Circle one)   Cell phone   Classroom phone   Email

Gender: (Circle one)   Male   Female   Age: _____

Grade level(s) taught _____ Subject(s) taught: _____

Years teaching experience: _____ Years at this Middle School: _____

Bachelor's Degree: _____
                    (Name of College/University)   (Major)

Master's Degree: _____
                  (Name of College/University)   (Major)

Professional Certification: _____

VITA

Matthew Rush Flinton

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: THE ROLE OF PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER LEADERSHIP WITHIN
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: A CULTURAL THEORY
PERSPECTIVE

Major Field: SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

Biographical:

Education:
Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School
Administration, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May, 2020.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Arts in Educational Leadership at
University of Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 2007.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Education at University of
Central Oklahoma, Edmond, Oklahoma in 1998.

Experience:
Bethany Public Schoolsô August 2011- Present
- Chief Operations Officer
- High School Principal
- Middle School Principal
Putnam City Schoolsô August 1999- May 2011
- HS/ MS Assistant Principal 2006-2011
- Head Boys Track Coach, Spring 2001- 2006
- HS/MS Teacher, 1999- 2006

Professional Memberships:
Cooperative Council for Oklahoma School Administrators
Oklahoma Association of School Administrators
Southern Nazarene University Educator Preparation Council