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Building a Beloved Community of Literacy in Professional Spaces

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Beloved Community

The *Beloved Community*, first coined by philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce, was popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. as he envisioned a world where everyone would strive to benefit the common good, thus sharing the "wealth of the earth." A beloved community cares for people and is absent of poverty, hunger, hate, and prejudice. A beloved community is a safe and humanizing space. Embracing this concept as we consider the common good of schools, teachers, and students, we see connections between a beloved community and our human need for safe communities and space to grow into the premier versions of ourselves. We desire this in our personal lives, as well as in our profession as educators. In fact, research affirms that activity in groups (i.e., churches, clubs, hobby groups) is directly linked to our well-being (e.g., Li, 2007; Huxhold et al., 2013), specifically the personal ties that group activity generates (e.g., Lim & Putnam, 2010).

The COVID-19 pandemic changed our understanding of the world as we previously knew it, impacting social relationships and creating feelings of isolation and loneliness (Smith & Lim, 2020). Teachers are not immune to these impacts, and stress levels have exacerbated symptoms of anxiety, depression, and feelings of being overwhelmed (Besser et al., 2022; Ng'Eno, 2007). Long-term consequences can lead to exhaustion and less confidence/self-efficacy around teachers doing their job adequately (Burić & Kim, 2020). In the midst of these emotions and realities, we offer windows into ways we can support, empower, and grow literacy teachers as learners, thinkers, and professionals. That is, we, two literacy teacher educators, share our story

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of synthesizing research-based learnings, leaning into the voices of teachers, and hypothesizing best practices as we created a *beloved community* for both ourselves and the teachers with whom we work. In this, we drew upon the research of Seashore et al. (2003) around teacher professional development:

> We signify our interest not only in discrete acts of teacher sharing, but in the establishment of a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing, and focused on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes. …The hypothesis is that what teachers do together outside of the classroom can be as important as what they do inside in affecting school restructuring, teachers' professional development, and student learning. (p. 3)

We have experienced the power and intimacy of a beloved community within a professional space that has grown us as individuals and educators. Thus, we offer our experiences in hopes of equipping other educators to build capacity for this type of cultural establishment the beloved community necessitates. We have found a beloved community through engagement in two different professional development models:

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Learning Labs (LLs). Both models offer space within the literacy profession, including all levels and roles of educators, to embark on a meaningful learning experience that opens space for the creation of a beloved community that seeks to share the "wealth of the earth." However, for a beloved community to form, a specific mindset must be cultivated.

Cultivating a Mindset

Bringing people together can offer various dynamics, personalities, and experiences. Creating a beloved community takes intentionality and knowledge—it takes a growth mindset. Mindset theory suggests that how people view themselves impacts their lived experiences. Additionally, the theory describes core assumptions about the malleability of personal qualities, such as intelligence or personality (Dweck & Leggett, 1988). To unpack these concepts around mindset, we offer two scenarios in which individuals have come together to plan an event. In the first scenario, someone walks into the room already knowing what is going to happen and how it is going to happen; the details are determined. This individual's posture and demeanor might exude confidence or represent an inflated ego. They may ignore feedback or feel threatened by other ideas. Ultimately, based on their mindset, little discussion and collaboration are likely to take place. In the second scenario, someone walks into the room with curiosity and uncertainty as to how the event might be planned and organized. That is, they do not know what is going to happen and how it is going to happen; the details have yet to be determined. This individual's posture and demeanor are relaxed and inquisitive. They welcome feedback, alternate ideas, and new approaches. Ultimately, based on their mindset, rich discussion and collaboration can potentially take place.

Knowing/Fixed Mindset
The first scenario exemplifies a fixed mindset, or a belief that intelligence, talent, and other qualities are innate and unchangeable (Dweck, 2006). Individuals with a fixed mindset often demonstrate a defensive attachment to one perspective. Adam Grant, professor and author of the text *Think Again* (2021), explains that often we

find it more comfortable and reassuring to hold on to what we already believe and know to be true, rather than confronting uncertainty or being open to doubt. However, being open to others' perspectives does not mean we change each time we hear one different than our own. Rather, we have room to listen and permission to stop holding our practices tightly, as if they are part of our identity.

Additionally, individuals with a fixed mindset often see fewer ideas, choices, and paths to accomplish goals. While many of us feel constrained by standards, mandated assessments and district requirements, for good reason, we still need to approach situations with the same flexible mindset. In other words, often we cannot change our circumstances; however, we can moderate our mindset and approach. In this, Grant (2021) explores the difficulty in doing this, as often individuals not only find it difficult to reconsider alternate beliefs or ideas, but they have an initial resistance to even considering the possibility of rethinking their established viewpoints. However, if we withhold change, or a willingness to rethink, in ourselves and others, intentionally or unintentionally, by holding firm to our knowing mindset, we do not create an environment for growth.

Unknowing/Growth Mindset
The second scenario exemplifies a growth mindset, or a belief that people can develop their abilities and intelligence through hard work and dedication (Dweck, 2006). A person with this mindset might be described as someone who listens and is collaborative. There is no shame in not knowing or making adjustments. In fact, it is viewed as growth when we enter situations without the answer and seek a depth of understanding. And when we go in without knowing, it allows others to do the same.

Growth mindset thinking increases avenues for choice, change and mental flexibility. Without the feelings of anxiousness and defensiveness, we are mentally released to explore options. In the beginning, this will take a conscious decision (i.e., intentionality). However, in time, a growth mindset can develop and grow within any of us, as we embrace rethinking ideas and multiple viewpoints.

In this, we open space to receive further knowledge, experiences and ideas that build on our previous knowledge, experiences, and ideas. Our schemas broaden and deepen as we continuously improve and refine.

Growth Mindset Continuum

In life, and specifically in the world of schools and classrooms, our mindset is usually not all one or all another; individuals don't neatly categorize into fixed or growth. Rather, most people describe their capacity to develop these abilities/mindsets as falling somewhere along a continuum (Anderson, 2019). However, cultivating mindsets, or shifting the dynamics of the continuum, isn't easy.

For us, as literacy teacher educators, we note how our own mindsets continually shift based on contributing factors, such as stress, personal interests, and environmental influences. When we personally reflect on our own state/mindset, noting points where we have fallen into a fixed pattern of thinking, we identify ways we can foster an adjustment. That is, increases in growth mindset have been significantly associated with self-regulation strategies (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). To progress closer towards a growth mindset, individuals can incorporate strategies such as goal setting, perseverance techniques, and reflection on learning from mistakes. These might be individually developed or could be incorporated into a collaborative learning space, as discussed later.

In addition, building a motivated, engaged culture can support a willingness to make adjustments in our mindset, moving along the continuum. In schools, specifically, when teachers experience strong self-efficacy and an increased sense of responsibility, they can more readily take up a growth mindset, which can contribute to lower burnout rates and higher job satisfaction (Zheng et al., 2023). Offering teachers agency over aspects of their professional development can project the perception that teachers are valued and trusted. From this space, teachers' work can take on personal investment, thus encouraging movement on the mindset continuum and development of beloved communities.

Choosing a Professional Development Frame

As literacy teacher educators, we have built a beloved community through two professional development frames: Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and Learning Labs (LLs). We have found these models embrace the mantra of benefitting the common good, specifically when participants enter with an unknowing/growth mindset. Below we share how these two frames offered space for us, and others, to engage in meaningful and relevant learning.

Professional Learning Communities as Beloved Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) have become almost ubiquitous in schools as groups of teachers, often organized around grade-level teams, meet monthly to work through curriculum needs, discuss assessment data, and/or collaborate on best practices with the goal of improving student learning. DuFour et al. (2016) define a PLC as a group of educators committed to working collaboratively in collective inquiry and action research to improve student learning outcomes. According to Wan (2020), "the emergence of PLCs in the educational context has widely been recognized as a significant development toward improving the quality of learning and teaching through the promotion of shared values and expectations among teachers to support student learning" (p. 695). This support is specifically found because PLCs focus not only on individual teachers' professional learning, but also on professional learning within a community context, thus actualizing the notion of collective learning (Louis et al., 1996; Talbert et al., 1993). However, for PLCs to be effective, teachers must feel safe, with established respect and trust (Prenger et al., 2021). Teachers also need a shared vision (De Neve & Devos, 2017).

As literacy faculty at a large university, we decided to create our own PLC to grow ourselves as literacy teacher educators. Specifically, we focused on ways we could cultivate culturally and historically responsive literacy practices in both our practice and the practice of the teachers within our program. To do this, we committed to meeting together as

a beloved community; we agreed to: come to each meeting with an unknowing mindset, deepen trust and vulnerability, and abide by our shared group norms (see Figure 1). The articulated commitments, structures, and protocols offered a framework for our beloved community to grow. With that, the two norms we found most supportive included presuming positive intentions of each group member and allowing everyone an opportunity to contribute, as they invited us to move into more vulnerable spaces without fear.

During our PLC meetings, we collaborated around a predetermined line of inquiry centered on a shared text as a form of professional growth—cultivating culturally and historically responsive literacy practices. In preparation for each meeting, as group members, we spent time pre-reading content that had been selected based on the topic. While reading, we noted ideas that resonated, caused us to pause, brought to mind questions, and/or prompted us to engage in further dialogue. Thus, each participant came to the small group discussions with growth mindsets, ready to learn and grow with others.

Our experiences within the PLC formed us into a beloved community; that is, we experienced our PLC as a safe and humanizing space. Not only did we develop a deep connection surrounding our line of inquiry, growing our practice as literacy teacher educators, but we also grew and connected personally. As we regularly met, we established trust, listening to each other both on a professional level as well as a personal level. Sadly, one of our meetings took place the morning after the school shooting on the campus of Michigan State University. We chose to still come together, with most of our conversation centered around our emotions and plans to support students and ourselves. These experiences and conversations bonded us as a beloved community, while also helping us to think differently about our instruction, practice, and interactions with students. By the end of our time together, our level of connection and vulnerability was deeper than any of us had anticipated. In this way, we lived out what Seashore et al. (2003) noted, that what we do together outside of the classroom can have a meaningful impact on what we do inside the classroom. Thus, our PLC took on the characteristics of a beloved community where individuals with diverse backgrounds came together in a relationship of love, mutual respect, care, and intentional growth.

Building Your Own PLC

We created a beloved community with our colleagues through PLC's at our institution. However, as noted previously, PLCs can be used across and/or within all grade levels. To use PLCs as a form of professional development to support and extend student learning, and as a mechanism to create beloved communities, we suggest the following steps: (1) Determine the purpose of your PLC, (2) Recruit individuals into the group, (3) Acquire materials and set a schedule, and (4) Establish protocols for meaningful dialogue.

Figure 1
Shared Group Norms

Norms for Productive, Civil Discourse
1. Assume positive intention
2. Listen to hear
3. Use 'I' statements/speak from your own experience
4. Move up/down
5. Grow the conversation
6. Commit to the group and the purpose

Determine Purpose. PLCs can center around a variety of topics, but it is important to determine the group's purpose first. In our example, we collectively decided our purpose as we chose to read a shared text together. However, some PLCs are more top-down driven as administrators dictate lines of inquiry, micro-manage, and assign groups/times. Often, in K-12 schools, teachers are given the focus, such as increasing student comprehension of non-fiction text passages. Although choice and autonomy are preferred, as we know personal investment can impact teachers' mindset, a beloved community can still be established with a directed purpose, especially with the implementation of self-regulating strategies (Zhang & Zhang, 2021).

Recruit Participants. Drawing individuals into a group can be challenging, as often we feel stretched by all of our responsibilities. However, participating can be life-giving and cup-filling. If engagement is a requirement, there might be some resistance, thus requiring intentionality to ensure the time spent together embodies the characteristics of the beloved community. This development of a beloved community may take time for groups that are mandated to meet, specifically if there are individuals who need to cultivate and develop a growth mindset. However, making sure conversations benefit participants' interests and offer specific support toward meeting group goals through the use of self-regulating strategies can help participants move beyond the identified barriers and/or frustrations (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Offering participation through an invitation, whether written or face-to-face, can be the first step in drawing people to the group. For our literacy faculty, we used email to invite faculty into the PLC (see Figure 2). We also offer another invitation (see Figure 3) used to invite teachers into a PLC around building respectful relationships with students. Both invitations help to set purpose, as well as introduce group norms.

Figure 2
PLC Invitation to Literacy Faculty

I am writing to invite you all into a PLC titled *Unpacking Learning Around Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.* In this PLC, we will read the text *Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy* by Gholdy Muhammad. In reading, we will explore the question: As literacy educators, how might we embrace and cultivate culturally & historically responsive literacy practices in our field? My hope is that our conversations will allow us to meet together as a beloved community, with an unknowing mindset, while deepening trust & vulnerability.

Thus, I invite you to join the conversation! We will meet the following dates/times this winter in the library. While reading, please note ideas that resonate with you, cause you to pause/ponder, bring to mind questions, prompt you to want to engage in further dialogue, etc.

Introduction & Chapter 1 Tuesday, January 17, 3:45-4:45 pm
Chapters 2 & 3 Tuesday, January 31, 3:45-4:45 pm
Chapters 4 Tuesday, February 14, 3:45-4:45 pm
Chapters 5 & 6 Tuesday, February 28, 3:45-4:45 pm
Chapter 7 Tuesday, March 14, 3:45-4:45 pm
Chapter 8 Tuesday, March 28, 3:45-4:45 pm

Figure 3
PLC Invitation to Classroom Teachers

As a district, one of our key focuses is building respectful relationships with our students. Thus, we will begin a Building Respectful Relationships PLC in which we will read and discuss the text *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World* by Django Paris & H. Samy Alim. In addition, we will work through the learning module centered on this high-leverage teaching practice in [The TeachingWorks Online Library](#).

In this PLC, we hope to gain a collective understanding as well as attributes we want to hold in the area of relationship building. Our discussions will lead to shared knowledge as well as personalize ways we can apply these concepts into our own teaching.

If you have not yet created an account on the [TeachingWorks Resource Library](#), please do so before Tuesday's meeting. Plan to read Chapter 1 of *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies: Teaching and Learning for Justice in a Changing World*. We will explore the site and look at activity options available for Building Respectful Relationships as we center our discussion around our understanding of the included practices. This should synthesize well with our understandings derived from Chapter 1, and how we might begin implementing the practice.

I am looking forward to our time collaborating together across the district in the coming weeks. We will meet every other Tuesday via Zoom; our first meeting is on Tuesday, January 17, 3:45-4:45 pm. When reading in preparation, note ideas that resonate with you, cause you to pause/ponder, bring to mind questions, prompt you to want to engage in further dialogue, etc. At the end of our first meeting, we will determine our pre-reading to complete before the next meeting in two weeks.

Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions or need for clarification.

Acquire Materials and Set Schedule. For our PLC, we valued the power of real-time, face-to-face dialogue, as we felt that being together physically might help us act and feel more like a beloved community. Thus, we determined our schedule based on all participants' availability and met in person on campus every other week for one hour. Sharing the reading and meeting schedule upfront was important, specifically as it related to our shared norm around commitment to the group and the purpose of the PLC. However, PLCs can meet virtually as well (see Figure 3).

Depending on geography and availability, virtual meetings can make real-time dialogue a reality. Often, this is the area groups can have the most agency around. If participation and the line of inquiry were predetermined, meeting modes and times can offer opportunities to make autonomous choices, including the addition of personal material choices. Exploring, leading, and embedding personal interests in the PLC can evoke increased engagement, motivation, and a growth mindset, which all can lead to the creation of a beloved community.

Establish Norms. At our first meeting, we offered a list of group norms we could use while engaged in productive, civil discourse. In this offering, participants were asked to describe, clarify, revise, and question these norms in hopes of establishing a shared collection of group norms for this particular PLC. Our PLC agreed upon our Group Norms (see Figure 1), which helped us move quickly into deep conversations centered around the text and our experiences as literacy teacher educators, truly experiencing the beloved community where we felt safe, valued, and humanized.

As noted previously, our mindsets can shift and move along the continuum. With that, part of the time spent establishing the norms could include opportunities for participants to reflect on their starting mindsets and their ability to employ self-regulation strategies. Thus, while discussing the norms, drawing participants into the purposes and implementation of the norms can create cohesion and buy-in within the group (Zhang & Zhang, 2021). Suggested ways to engage in this dialogue include the following questions: What goals does our group have? How can we support each other in accomplishing these? What can we do when we encounter barriers to our goals to allow us to persevere? How can we reflect on our mistakes to promote learning? In addressing these questions, the group can begin to set the stage for a beloved community to form.

Learning Labs as a Beloved Community
While we, as faculty, were able to experience a beloved community together through our PLC, we longed for the teachers with whom we work to experience a beloved community both with us and with each other. Thus, within our graduate program, we have come to see our use of Learning Labs (LLs) as a frame for building a beloved community among teachers. According to Sweeney (2011), learning labs were first introduced in the early 1990s and designed to offer teachers opportunities to observe and reflect on effective instruction. That is, LLs are guided classroom visits led by classroom teachers, acting as hosts, and facilitated by instructional coaches. In this, LLs: (1) emphasize teacher observations and conversations around student learning; (2) move educators toward shared understandings of best practice; and (3) prompt teachers to identify, articulate and address specific student learning needs. LLs can offer safe spaces for teachers to engage in observations and rich conversations around student learning, acting as an effective tool for professional development and creating a culture of collaborative learning (Hamilton et al., 2019). Through participation in LLs, teachers reflect on their own instruction, which often leads to the implementation of changes in their instructional practices, while also altering beliefs about their own and students' roles, responsibilities, and capabilities (Brancard & Quinnwilliams, 2012).

Figure 4
Key Roles in LLs (Hamilton et al., 2019, p. 46)

Who Participates in an LL?
3 Key Roles: • **Facilitator:** Typically, an instructional coach, but could be a classroom teacher, who introduces group norms, keeps discussion on task, and provides summary of conversation. • **Host:** Classroom teachers seeking to grow their practice and student learning. They provide a lesson plan, invite peers into their teaching space, and share observations, including what they noticed and what they would like to focus on. • **Peers:** Educators seeking to grow through observation, discussion, and reflection. They connect around the host's specific goals/questions and share noticings, questions, and observations to prompt the host's thinking, reflection, and assessment (ideally, 4-7 total).

Although we have been using LLs for over 10 years with teachers enrolled in our graduate literacy program, the past few years have taught us that learning labs can counter the feelings of isolation and aloneness teachers often experience (Sweeney, 2011). Thus, additionally, we see LLs as an avenue for establishing a beloved community where teachers feel safe, valued, and empowered. LLs are conversations between educational professionals that are collaborative and focused on evidence of student learning. These are not "fix-it," "strategy sharing," or "master teaching" sessions, but rather spaces to embrace a growth mindset, allowing educators to focus and reflect on specific areas of instruction and student learning. Participants include a host, peers, and facilitator (see Figure 4).

When engaging in LLs with practicing teachers, we start with the facilitator reviewing the shared group norms (see Figure 5), which reminds us to come to the experience with a growth mindset, open to new ideas and learning. Then, following a protocol that guides and supports our conversations centered on student learning (see Figure 6), the host teacher shares instructional practices through both a written lesson plan and a real-time or video-recorded observation. The host also sets the focus for the LL, highlighting specific areas or moments in the instruction they would like to explore further. Then, discussion ensues as peers interact with the host and each other by asking questions, offering noticings, and encouraging reflection. We specifically draw on the work of Toll (2006) to frame questions

Figure 5
LL Norms for Collaboration

Norms for Collaboration?
Promote a spirit of inquiry and curiosity. *Seek first to understand before advocating ideas.*
Pause. *Pause before responding and/or asking a question to allow for think time.*
Paraphrase. *Restate ideas to help all members hear and understand what is being presented.*
Probe for specificity. *Ask questions to increase clarity and self-reflection.*
Pay attention to self & others. *Watch body language and check perceptions.*
Presume positive intentions. *Choose to believe that the host, their students, and your peers are doing the best they can within the circumstances they have been given.*

Figure 6
LL Protocol

What Happens in a LL? (35-45 minutes)
FACILITATOR - Review Norms (1-2 minutes)
HOST – Initial briefing (5 minutes)
PEERS – Pre-Conversation Noticings (3-4 minutes)
HOST – Name Goals for LL (1-2 minutes)
PEERS & HOST – Discussion (15-20 minutes)
FACILITATOR – Summary (2-3 minutes)
HOST – Ideas for Moving Forward (3-4 minutes)
PEERS – Post-Conversation Noticings/Takeaways (3-4 minutes)

that are learner-oriented, focused on evidence, and judgment-free, such as "Could you tell me more?" or "I noticed . . . Can you share your thoughts behind that decision?" After discussion, the facilitator summarizes key conversation points and asks the host to share next steps to support student learning. The LL concludes with each peer sharing one to two learning takeaways.

Teachers report that LLs encourage implementation of current best practices of instruction while also enhancing collegiality (Patterson & Tolnay, 2015). With that, LLs are viewed as valuable because of the opportunities teachers have to engage in thoughtful planning and reflection, which can be both motivating and empowering. In our experience, engaging in this work offered teachers the opportunity to participate in a beloved community. One 1st grade teacher shared,

> The probing questions highlighted the knowledge, skills, and experiences I already brought to the lesson, helping me clarify my thinking or remember successful strategies used in past lessons. This empowered me to realize that I was already doing great things in my classroom and that I have the tools to problem-solve issues that will arise during instruction. The learning labs were so affirming, allowing me to feel supported and empowered within a community of professionals.

A 4th grade teacher explained,

> Participating in the learning labs has been such a powerful learning experience for me and has strengthened my confidence to try new writing strategies during small group instruction. Learning labs encouraged me to think about other problems of practice that I want to explore, research, and try in my classroom. Participating enabled me to feel more comfortable recording myself teaching and helped me to be more vulnerable and allow others into my learning environment. I learned so much about myself through this process, as I was learning in a safe and inspiring space.

These teachers' testimonies demonstrate the power of the beloved community established and rooted in the professional development model of LLs. When teachers come together with a growth mindset, focused on student learning and free of judgment, growth,

connection, and empowerment spring forth both personally and professionally.

Building Your Own LLs
We created a beloved community with and for practicing teachers through the use of LLs embedded in a graduate literacy instruction practicum. However, LLs can be used as a form of professional development to support and extend student learning, and as a mechanism to create beloved communities, across and/or within all grade levels. To do that, we suggest the following steps: (1) Find a facilitator who is equipped to guide the learning labs, (2) Recruit individuals into the endeavor, (3) Acquire materials and set a schedule, and (4) Agree to group norms and protocols.

Find a Facilitator. A facilitator is a person that makes an action or process flow with ease. Thus, within LLs, facilitators focus on adult learning (i.e., host, peers) and how it impacts student learning (Sweeney, 2007). To do this work, facilitators must take the stance that they are not experts, but rather co-learners that understand the roles of an effective facilitator (e.g., coordinator, documenter, meeting designer, facilitator) and the parameters/protocols of the LLs. LL facilitators should be prepared to provide resources, teach and guide the process, and support LL hosts and peers.

Recruit Participants. Research indicates LLs positively impact teacher beliefs and instructional practices (Brancard & Quinnwilliams, 2012) while also facilitating the transfer of best practices from theory to practice and meeting both individual teacher and school-wide needs (Patterson & Tolnay, 2015). Along with research, teacher testimonies are often a powerful way to draw teachers into the work of LLs. In our work over the years, teachers have expressed feelings of anxiety and insecurity when thinking about others observing their teaching. However, year after year, teachers share that progressing past these feelings and engaging in the work of LLs benefited them and moved them to a space of growth. For example, one 5th grade teacher shared,

> Our district recently sent out an email about participating and/or hosting LLs, and I agreed to participate. In the past, this was definitely something

I shied away from. However, after taking this course, I learned so much through this experience; it was impactful on my instruction and student learning.

We suggest sharing teachers' stories when asking teachers to participate in an LL endeavor.

Acquire Materials and Set Schedule. LLs can be conducted face-to-face or completely online using video-recorded lessons, digital documents, and synchronous online meetings. Regardless of the mode, the constructed schedule must offer participants opportunities to adequately prepare for LL sessions (i.e., preview materials and video-recorded observations), fully engage in the LL protocol (see Figure 6), and reflect thoughtfully on the learning.

Establish Norms and Protocols. At the first meeting, the facilitator should share the group norms that will be used within the LL. As a group, participants should describe, clarify, and agree upon these norms (see Figure 5). Additionally, the facilitator should explain the LL protocol (see Figure 6) to establish a predictable framework that guides the experience and interactions. Both the norms and the protocols help to alleviate some of the anxiety teachers will feel and ultimately assist in cultivating growth mindsets and establishing a beloved community. One 10th grade teacher shared,

> The LLs supported my sense of efficacy around instruction. The protocol ensured a positive experience when I was the host teacher because my peers focused on naming components of the lesson and probing my thinking. I never was put in a position where I felt evaluated or critiqued.

Conclusions

The importance of teachers actively engaging in professional development experiences that foster the creation of a beloved community is more pertinent now than ever before. The educational landscape continues to evolve, with diverse classrooms reflecting a rich tapestry of cultures, backgrounds, and perspectives. However, within those rich and beautiful spaces, teachers are experiencing heightened feelings of isolation, loneliness, and anxiety. As this paper highlights, professional development opportunities such as PLCs and LLs can encourage the development of beloved communities when individuals engage in these experiences with unknowing/growth mindsets. Professional development opportunities like these not only benefit students through improved instruction but also empower educators to grow professionally and personally together. The transformative potential of these experiences extends beyond the classroom, shaping our society by fostering understanding, respect, and unity among individuals, concepts that underpin a *beloved community*.

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