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Does Presence Matter? A Qualitative Exploration of Whether Principal Participation in PLCs Fosters Teacher Collaboration and Teacher Leadership

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Does Presence Matter? A Qualitative Exploration of Whether Principal Participation in
PLCs Fosters Teacher Collaboration and Teacher Leadership

By
Rechel Anderson

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb Graduate Education Department
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Education

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Rechel Anderson under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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and weekends when I was occupied researching and writing, please know that you were

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and to accomplish all your goals and dreams! I love you!

Abstract

Does Presence Matter? A Qualitative Exploration of Whether Principal Participation in PLCs Fosters Teacher Collaboration and Teacher Leadership. Anderson, Rechel, 2016: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, Professional Learning Communities/Teacher Collaboration/Teacher Leadership

Many researchers focused their attention on increasing student achievement by increasing collaboration within the culture of the school by increasing collaboration among educators. Huffman and Hipp (2003) noted that most school reforms fail because the focus on a supportive school culture towards teacher leadership and collaboration is minimal. Therefore, working collaboratively within the confines of the school environment is indicative of the foundation required to promote student achievement. A professional learning community (PLC), as defined by DuFour and Eaker (2007), is a learning environment that supports collaboration, continuous improvement, and data-driven decision making. The purpose of this qualitative research was to answer whether principal participation in PLCs fostered teacher collaboration and teacher leadership. The data revealed that principal participation in PLCs did foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership, and the interviewees were asked to identify the behaviors that fostered teacher collaboration and teacher leadership. Two one-on-one interview sessions were conducted and served as the research method for querying purposefully selected K-12 teachers. Only teachers whose principal participated in the full implementation of the U.S. Department of Education grant written by the South Carolina University were eligible for participation in this research. This study utilized the conceptual framework of DuFour and Eaker's (1998) PLC model.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Working in isolation, as opposed to experiencing the benefits of interacting and learning cooperatively, symbolizes the divergent thinking of many educators in decades past. As early as the 1960s, the term professional learning communities (PLCs) emerged as researchers began searching for alternatives to teaching in isolation (All Things PLC, 2008). In the 1980s, PLC evolved as the acronym for describing organizational members working together for the purpose of achieving organizational goals in the school settings; however, PLCs do not diminish the significance of individual teachers but instead underscore the importance of ongoing, job-embedded professional development vital to continuous improvement of teachers, principals, and ultimately the schools (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

At this writing, no universal definition exists for PLCs as the connotations and descriptions for PLCs are inexhaustible. DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Many (2010) asserted that the term PLC is commonplace in describing any loose coupling of people and is in danger of losing all meaning. In some school settings, the acronym PLC describes any grade level planning teams in which the participants make decisions based on current data (DuFour, 2004; Jessie, 2007). According to Hord (1997b), a PLC is an ongoing process through which teachers and administrators work collaboratively to seek and share learning to enhance their effectiveness as professionals. DuFour and Eaker (2007) described a PLC as educators working collaboratively in a continuous process of collective inquiry, commitment, and action research to achieve better student results. Thus, most experts would agree that PLCs helped to deprivatize teaching; and in some schools, teachers tackle instructional issues collaboratively, pooling their knowledge and expertise in a systemic way to effect learning for all students (Chenoweth & Theokas,

2011).

Mostly teachers, administrators, and support staff comprise PLCs (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Huffman, 2000). In some schools, community members and students participate in PLCs (Stoll, Bolam, McMahom, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007). Regardless of the composition of the team, PLCs facilitate capacity building, cooperation, and collaboration. The significance of teacher collaboration cannot be overstated as collaboration facilitates collective engagement in meaningful work, thus creating collective leadership (Fullan, 2011).

Few educators would argue against the advantages of teacher collaboration. A collaborative team of teachers is more than a group of people who meet periodically; a collaborative team in a PLC is a group of teachers working interdependently to achieve common goals (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Common mission, vision, and beliefs are the backbone of collaborative teams. As the teacher collaboration matures, teachers grow professionally, mutually exploring deeper aspects of curriculum and instruction, pedagogy, and student assessments. Thus, a collaborative culture evolves that is results-oriented (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

In PLCs, teacher collaboration centers around what teachers expect the students to learn and be able to do, how to impart knowledge, what happens when students do not learn, what happens when students do learn, and how the teachers will know for sure (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011; DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Undoubtedly, the beneficiaries of teacher collaboration are the students. Principals in schools that become PLCs understand the importance of teacher collaboration, and they understand the importance of supporting and creating the conditions that foster such. They ensure that teachers are clear on the school mission and vision as they provide the time and systems

necessary for teacher collaboration. Teacher leaders are allowed to make decisions because they are closet to the issues; therefore, principals support them making instructional decisions (Chenoweth & Theokas, 2011).

Undoubtedly, the job responsibilities of 21st century principals are voluminous as the mandates of society directly impact the needs of the school. Principals cannot *do it alone*. The necessity of teacher leadership and collaborative teams is more pronounced in the 21st century than ever before in the history of public education. DuFour and Marzano (2011) believed that in the absence of PLCs, principals struggle to meet the individual needs of teachers. Rather than focusing on numerous teachers individually, PLCs allow principals to work with teams of teachers, thus having a direct line of influence on collaborative teams.

Theoretical Background of the Study

Before the implementation of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation in 2002, public education experienced several reforms intended to improve the quality of education in the United States (Campbell & Smith, 1997). Stakeholders concerned with the decline in student achievement sought solutions for this downward trend in student performance (Benoliel, O'Gara, & Miske, 1999; Motala, 2000). Some of the concerns stemmed from a reaction to a published report in 1983 by the National Commission on Excellence in Education entitled *A Nation at Risk*: *The Imperative for Education Reform.* The members of the commission examined the quality of elementary and secondary public education in the United States. The report revealed that academic standards in public education had reached unacceptable levels (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Additionally, the members of the commission specifically stated that problems with public education included poor academic performance compared to

students from other countries, high levels of functional illiteracy among adults and 17 year olds, and a decline in achievement test scores (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Stakeholders determined the need for improvements in the areas of curriculum development, professional development, technology integration, and classroom instruction (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

In 2002, the U.S. Congress enacted NCLB under the George Bush administration (Willis, 2007). Many scholars agreed that NCLB placed strict accountability on building administrators and teachers to ensure the success of all students (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Hallinger & Heck, 2010). Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), the method of measuring progress for NCLB, provided stakeholders with an annual report card of the academic progress for each school in each school district (South Carolina Department of Education, 2005). High-stakes testing of students was the method used to determine AYP by providing essential data to be analyzed and made available for public scrutiny (Pearlman, 2001). At the heart of NCLB was the notion that by 2014, all students would achieve AYP.

Under President Obama's administration, the Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative allocated additional funding to schools that met the requirements of educational reform (Carroll & Foster, 2010). The RTTT initiative and NCLB dealt with many of the same issues and had many of the same goals, but the approaches were different. For example, NCLB focused on reading, while RTTT placed a huge emphasis on math and science education. NCLB desired to have every child proficient in reading, whereas the components of RTTT wanted to increase the high school graduation rate and expose more children to higher education (Parsons, 2013). Further, RTTT focused on four major reform components: the development of better assessments to include rigorous standards;

a more comprehensive data system to provide a more detailed report of a student's progress to parents, students, teachers, and schools; continuous support to improve teacher and school leader success; and a more developed focus to underachieving schools by providing more resources and interventions to foster improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

It is safe to assert that the U.S. federal government historically steps into education for various and compelling reasons such as matters of inequality and matters of social and school reform. While federal initiatives such as NCLB and RTTT provide needed support, incentives, and funding for school reform, "both ignore the call for educational practices that are grounded in research" (DuFour & Mattos, 2013, p. 34). School-level initiatives such as PLCs help create a collaborative yet procedural framework for school reform and help build internal leadership capacity for sustained growth. DuFour and Fullan (2013) posited that continuity of direction is promoted by looking for leadership within. DuFour and Marzano (2011) acknowledged that the best strategy for improving schools and school districts is to develop the collective capacity of teachers to function as members of a PLC.

The South Carolina school district in this study (referred to as District M) took part in a U.S. Department of Education grant written and implemented by a small yet prestigious university located in central South Carolina. The goal of the grant was to help build internal capacity in select struggling, rural, low-wealth school districts in South Carolina by providing ongoing professional development and mentoring to the principals. Toward that end, the university hired five mentors to implement the grant. The five mentors, all retired principals or superintendents, had experienced success in school reform during their careers.

The grant implementation phase began in the 2011 school year. PLC training was the underlying focus of the monthly professional development activities for the principals with the expectation and requirement that each principal would go back to his or her school and implement PLCs with fidelity. The training presented to the principals was based on the research of Rebecca and Richard DuFour. By design, the monthly trainings evolved into system-wide principal PLCs. In addition to the monthly principal PLCs, the mentors visited each principal mentees monthly to support the district-wide initiative. The grant terminated at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. After 4 years of training, the assumption was that principals in District M fully understood how to plan and implement PLCs as a strong medium for school reform.

To implement an effective professional learning environment, the principal has to accept collaboration and collegiality, promote professional development for teachers and administrators, endorse teachers as leaders, and welcome an increased involvement of parents and the community (Stoll et al., 2006; Stoll & Louis, 2007). No longer are principals looked upon as simply the managers of the school building (Greifner, 2006). In accordance with the expectations of NCLB and RTTT, principals of the 21st century must help champion academic successes for all students. Principals are required to craft a culture of collaboration within the school. Thus, teachers must feel free to articulate their opinions and share their expertise, collaborate, and take risks without fear of retaliation or reprisal. Each member of the PLC has equal power. No single person has all of the knowledge, skills, and expertise to fulfill all of the leadership needs of the school (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). The school must become a community of learners with the recognition that the principal cannot do it alone (Hallinger & Heck 2010). "Widespread leadership is imperative to sustained improvements" (DuFour & Fullan,

2013, p. 71). As written by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP, 2008), "transforming a school into a learning community requires the sharing of leadership, power, and decision making while remaining committed to the core values and results" (p. 19).

Statement of the Problem

The extant literature dealing with PLCs offers numerous philosophical and theoretical viewpoints on PLCs and school reform. Embedded in many of the views is the supposition that principals understand how to foster teacher collaboration during PLCs. Nevertheless, as put forward by DuFour and Marzano (2011),

> perhaps the biggest mistake leaders make when attempting to create a
> collaborative culture within the school is to assign teachers and principals into
> groups and encourage them to collaborate–with little direction or support . . . the
> likelihood that people who have worked in isolation their entire career will
> suddenly discover how to collaborate as a team . . . is extremely remote. (p. 47)

Simply assigning teachers to teams and asking them to collaborate is like putting students into groups and expecting cooperative learning to occur; notably, teachers on a typical leadership team may represent a wide range of readiness levels when it comes to assuming leadership roles (Wilhelm, 2010). Likewise, the supposition that principals understand how to foster teacher collaboration in PLCs as well as the supposition that teachers comfortably collaborate and share leadership roles in the presence of the principal may be erroneous.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research was to answer whether principals in District M foster *teacher collaboration* and ultimately *shared leadership* in PLCs. Also,

from this study emerged the most prevalent behaviors used by District M principals for

fostering teacher collaboration in PLCs. Face-to-face interviews served as the data

collection method for this study. Only teachers whose principals participated in the full

implementation of the U.S. Department of Education grant written by the South Carolina

University took part in this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions, heavily based on the research of Richard

DuFour and Robert Marzano, guided this qualitative research study.

Central question. How do principals in District M foster teacher collaboration

and teacher leadership in PLCs?

Subquestion. What are identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration

and teacher leadership?

The questions for the two interview sessions follow.

Interview questions.

1. What are the defining characteristics of the PLCs in your school?

2. What is/are the foci of your PLCs?

3. How does your principal participate in PLCs?

4. How does your principal and PLC team connect the school's mission, vision,

    and goals to the work of the PLCs?

5. How does your principal foster teacher collaboration during PLCs?

6. How does your principal create the conditions and/or environment for

    successful teacher collaboration (before, during, after PLCs)?

7. What systems (time for PLCs, training, resources, support, etc.) are in place to

    foster successful teacher collaboration? Who is responsible for putting the

systems in place?

8. What happens to the culture of collaboration among teachers when your principal is present and participates in PLCs? Does the presence of the principal influence team culture or team collaboration during PLCs? How? Does the culture of collaboration change when the principal participates in PLCs? How?

9. How does your principal encourage teachers to challenge the status quo?

10. How does your principal foster open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs?

11. How do the teachers freely voice their opinions when the principal participates in PLCs? Why or why not?

12. How does your principal foster shared leadership during PLCs?

13. How do you perceive that the PLC team feels empowered to make decisions that directly impact the quality of student learning when the principal participates in PLCs, or do the teachers wait on the principal to guide them and tell them what to do? Explain your answer.

14. What are identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership?

Significance of Study

Information gleaned from this study may capture the top or most prevalent ways that principals in District M foster teacher collaboration and shared leadership as perceived by the teachers. Practitioners in the field of education will be able to apply, as appropriate, the top or most prevalent strategies in other PLC settings. Additionally, the new data obtained from the study may add to the body of knowledge on teacher

collaboration, PLCs, and school reform efforts, especially in small, low-performing, rural school districts.

Overview of Methodology

Utilizing purposeful sampling, one-on-one structured interviews were conducted with 15 K-12 teachers (five elementary, five middle, and five high school teachers) in District M. Each interviewee received the same questions. The responses from the interviewees were audiotaped, transcribed, compiled, coded, and analyzed for patterns and themes.

Definition of Terms

The terms below were frequently used throughout this research. The definitions provide common denotation and clarity between the researcher and the reader.

AYP. One of the foundations of NCLB. It is a measure of year-to-year student achievement on statewide assessments (South Carolina Department of Education, 2005).

Culture. Culture is essentially a social indoctrination of unwritten rules that people learn as they try to fit in a particular group (Schein, 2009). Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) defined culture as "the glue that holds people together; the way we do things around here" (p. 6); and specifically and for the purpose of this study, culture is the way things are done around the school to include norms, routines, unwritten rules, rituals, and celebrations.

Culture of collaboration. Culture of collaboration is a process that facilitates learning by providing practitioners of differentiated abilities opportunities to discuss, debate, observe, and share practices (Schein, 2009).

Consistent systems. For the purpose of this research, consistent systems are essential components, pertinent structures, necessities, and/or any prerequisite

requirements that facilitate the smooth operation and success of PLCs. Consistent systems may include but not be limited to the following: common planning time for teachers of like subjects; designated time for PLCs; provisions for needed resources such as meeting space, technology, agendas; support from curriculum facilitator; research; state and local data; and articulated vision, mission, goals, and expectations.

District M. District M is located in the Pee Dee area of Northeast, South Carolina. It serves approximately 5, 200 students across 15 schools; an early childhood center, two primary schools, two elementary schools, one intermediate school, three middle schools, three high schools, one academy for careers and technology, one success academy alternative school, and one adult education center. Demographically, District M serves 73% African-American, 21% White, 3% Hispanic, 1% Native-American, and 2% two or more race students (South Carolina Report Card, 2014).

Distributive leadership/shared leadership. Leadership roles and practices depicted by the use of collaborative leadership practices within a school's culture (Hallinger & Heck, 2010).

Foster. Fostering is developed through reflective dialogue within a community that forces debate and promotes understanding and appreciation of the work of others (Senge, 1990).

High-stakes testing. High-stakes testing is the use of test scores to make decisions that have important significances such as high school graduation, promotion to the next grade, access to resources and special opportunities, and summative measures of teacher quality (Pearlman, 2001).

NCLB. Federal legislation that sets deadlines for states to increase the scope and frequency of student testing, revamp their accountability systems, and guarantee that

every teacher is qualified in their subject area. NCLB also requires states to make demonstrable annual progress in raising the percentage of students being proficient in reading and math and in narrowing the test score gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students (South Carolina Department of Education, 2008).

      PLC. PLC is a term that refers to the collaborative effort that uses research and school data to guide decisions that support student and teacher learning (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 1998).

      Teacher collaboration. Teacher collaboration is the process of teaching or collaborative work that teachers make visible to other teachers in and through their interactions with each other and the material environment (Little, 2003).

      Teacher empowerment. Teacher empowerment is focused interactions among peers that provide opportunities for teachers to work diligently, utilize best practices, keep up with current research, and help every teacher be as good as the best teacher in the building while using decisions that affect the culture of the school (Huffman & Hipp, 2003).

      Teacher leaders. Teacher leaders are those who take an active role in leadership and have a profound impact on the change that is needed to sustain a higher quality of education (Pugalee, Frykholm, & Shaka, 2001).

      U.S. Department of Education grant. The grant referenced in this study is a federally funded grant written by the Department of Educational Leadership in a university in South Carolina. The grant period began in 2011 and ended October 30, 2015. The implementation period for principals was July 2011 through June 2015.

Limitations and Assumptions

      Assumptions are self-evident truths (Creswell, 2012). In this study, it may be

assumed that the participants are highly qualified. Additionally, it may be assumed that participants answered truthfully and accurately the interview questions based on their personal experiences. Further, it may be assumed that PLCs are operational in each school in District M in accordance with the training provided by the South Carolina University mentors.

The limitations of a study are the potential weaknesses over which this research has no control and that may affect the results (Creswell, 2012). A limitation of this study is the scope or the extent of the study. The survey participants were limited to 15 purposefully selected teachers from District M. The participants may or may not be representative of the entire body of potential participants.

Summary of Chapters

Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the problem for research. Chapter 2 reviews the related literature on PLCs, teacher collaboration, the role of the principal in PLCs, and shared leadership. Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the research design and the methodology used in this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, whereas Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings in relation to the related literature. Additionally, Chapter 5 includes implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Experts in the field of education realize that leading schools in the 21st century is a massive undertaking that requires a team of leaders capable of meeting the needs and expectations of the students and the mandates of society. Principal success may depend on how well principals are able to distribute leadership responsibilities among teacher leaders and empower teachers to make decisions that positively impact learning outcomes. PLCs facilitate widespread leadership (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Additionally, many experts believe that becoming a PLC is an effective strategy for producing long-term professional development for school administrators and teachers and for enhancing student achievement (Dallas, 2006; Schmoker, 2005; Stoll et al., 2006). PLCs involve teachers in *site-based* professional development that is collaborative and continuous (Linder, Post, & Calabrese, 2012). Nevertheless, as put forward by DuFour and Marzano (2011),

> perhaps the biggest mistake leaders make when attempting to create a
> collaborative culture within the school is to assign teachers and principals into
> groups and encourage them to collaborate–with little direction or support . . . the
> likelihood that people who have worked in isolation their entire career will
> suddenly discover how to collaborate as a team . . . is extremely remote. (p. 57)

Simply assigning teachers to teams and asking them to collaborate is like putting students into groups and expecting cooperative learning to occur; notably, teachers on a typical leadership team may represent a wide range of readiness levels when it comes to assuming leadership roles (Wilhelm, 2010). Likewise, the supposition that principals understand how to foster teacher collaboration in PLCs as well as the supposition that

teachers comfortably collaborate and share leadership roles in the presence of the principal may be erroneous. Undoubtedly, principals must create the right environment to foster effective teacher collaboration.

The purpose of this research was to answer whether principals in District M foster teacher collaboration and ultimately teacher leadership. This study also identified the behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership. Face-to-face interviews served as the data collection method.

The participants in this study, teachers in District M, a rural public school district in South Carolina serving 5,200 students, were led by principals who took part in the 4-year training on PLCs as a result of a U.S. Department of Education grant. The goal of the grant was to build internal capacity in select, struggling, rural, low-wealth school districts in South Carolina by providing ongoing professional development and mentoring to the principals. PLC training was the underlying focus of the monthly professional development activities for the principals with the expectation that each principal would go back to his or her school and implement PLCs with fidelity. By design, the monthly trainings evolved into system-wide, principal PLCs. The grant began in the spring of 2011 and ended in the spring of 2015. This qualitative study used narrative research in capturing the perceptions and thoughts of 15 purposefully selected teachers using the questions below.

Interview Questions

1. What are the defining characteristics of the PLCs in your school?

2. What is/are the foci of your PLCs?

3. How does your principal participate in PLCs?

4. How does your principal and PLC team connect the school's mission, vision,

and goals to the work of the PLCs?

5. How does your principal foster teacher collaboration during PLCs?

6. How does your principal create the conditions and/or environment for successful teacher collaboration (before, during, after PLCs)?

7. What systems (time for PLCs, training, resources, support, etc.) are in place to foster successful teacher collaboration? Who is responsible for putting the systems in place?

8. What happens to the culture of collaboration among teachers when your principal is present and participates in PLCs? Does the presence of the principal influence team culture or team collaboration during PLCs? How? Does the culture of collaboration change when the principal participates in PLCs? How?

9. How does your principal encourage teachers to challenge the status quo?

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14. What are identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership?

Theoretical Framework for the Study

Since the inception of NCLB in 2002, taxpayers have paid billions of dollars for federal educational programs that have failed significantly in improving the quality of public education (Burke & Sheffield, 2012). The mandates of NCLB have caused unnecessary pressures for some classroom teachers. History reveals that teachers have experienced other educational reforms that have called for drastic changes in educational philosophies (Margolis, 2006). Opposition to these changes have resulted in consequences such as a reduced chance of promotion and the constant threat of termination (Engquist, 2013; Margolis, 2006). Additionally, the recent common core standards caused frustration for some teachers, especially those teaching in low-achieving schools. Teachers were given the mandate to prepare students to meet the standards in a specified time. Failure to accomplish this goal resulted in some teachers losing their jobs and many of the low-achieving schools were closed (Engquist, 2013). Stakeholders would attest that in this era of accountability, the quality of education continues to decline in the United States as recent test scores have placed students below average when compared to other developed countries (D'Andrea, 2013). With the above data in mind, to date, PLCs may be teachers' and principals' most viable corridor into 21st century school reform.

The extant literature on PLCs and the associated philosophical and theoretical schools of thought are numerous; however, the following essential principles are the foci of the related literature review: the chronology emergence of PLCs, mission and vision-the nucleus of PLCs, PLCs and building a collaborative culture, the role of the principal in fostering a collaborative culture; and shared leadership.

Chronological Emergence of PLCs

The *History of PLCs* disclosed the following chronology regarding the emergence of PLCs (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2015): in the 1960s, educational experts began the search for ways to reverse the trend of teachers teaching in isolation. As decades passed, Susan Rosenholtz studied 78 schools that were characterized by collective commitment to student achievement and improved teaching using collaboration. Collaborative analysis, evaluation, and experimentation were conditions whereby teachers improved. The study showed that "Teacher collaboration linked to shared goals focused on student achievement led to improved teacher learning, greater certainty about what was effective, higher levels of teacher commitment and ultimately, greater gains in student achievement" (DuFour et al., 2015, para. 2). In 1993, Judith Warren Little and Milbrey McLaughlin concluded that the most effective schools and the most effective departments operated as PLCs and were characterized by the following:

- Shared norms and beliefs

- Collegial relations

- Collaborative cultures

- Reflective practice

- Ongoing technical inquiry regarding effective practice

- Professional growth

- Mutual support and mutual obligation (DuFour et al., 2015, para. 3).

Then, in 1995, after researching 1,200 schools, Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage detailed that the most successful schools were those that became PLCs to bring about school reform and that in those schools the educators

- Engaged in a collective effort to achieve a clear, commonly shared purpose

for student learning

- Created a collaborative culture to achieve purpose

- Took collective–rather than individual–responsibility for the learning of all students (DuFour et al., 2015, para. 5).

Also in 1995, Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis, and Anthony Bryk shared the schools that were high student achievement schools operated as PLCs utilizing

- Reflective dialogue

- Deprivatization of practice

- Collective focus on student learning

- Collaboration

- Shared norms and values (DuFour et al., 2015, para. 6).

In spite of the findings of the educational researchers regarding the benefits of PLCs, the impact on practitioners remained sluggish.

An important step in converting the professional learning community concept from a "secondary whisper" to "a major rally cry" was the publication of *Professional Learning Communities at Work™*: *Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* by Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (Solution Tree Press, 1998). (DuFour et al., 2015, para. 9)

It is safe to say, the rest is history. In subsequent years, the work of the early researchers along with the ongoing work of Richard and Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker and other educational experts have produced volumes of theoretical and philosophical writings on PLCs. However, common to most of the writings on this subject are the importance of shared purpose, shared norms, shared mission, vision, values, and goals.

Mission and Vision, the Nucleus of PLCs

DuFour (2005) defined PLCs as teachers working together while demonstrating the same vision, philosophies, and standards. Common beliefs, values, and behaviors are foundational to a shared mission and vision. Shared mission and vision are preconditions to effective teacher collaboration. A shared mission identifies the school's overall purpose. Thus, when creating a collaborative culture, two initial questions faculty, staff, and stakeholders must answer and/or reconcile are, "What is our purpose for existence" and "what do we seek to accomplish?" A clearly defined mission plays a vital role in the culture of a school and the daily processes that are in place for learning and teaching. The mission of a school should be entrenched into everyday behaviors and practices as teaching and learning take place (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). DuFour and Eaker (1998) and DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2010) suggested that when students do not learn, how the faculty responds and the ensuing behaviors should be embedded in the mission. The faculty, staff, and stakeholders must collaborate to ensure that all members of a school community mutually agree to the school's purpose and mission.

The school vision provides a "sense of direction" (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 62). According to the Glossary of Educational Reform (2014),

> A **vision statement**, or simply a *vision*, is a public declaration that schools or other educational organizations use to describe their high-level goals for the future—what they hope to achieve if they successfully fulfill their organizational purpose or mission. "A vision should provide a clear and coherent path for future action." (Kanold, 2011, p. 22)

A vision statement may describe a school's loftiest ideals, its core organizational values, its long-term objectives, or what it hopes its students will learn or be capable of

doing after graduating (Glossary of Educational Reform, 2014, p. 1). Without a vision of

what the school aspires to become, there is a lack of focus, unity of purpose, or direction.

Huffman and Hipp (2003) held that "it becomes readily apparent in school organizations

that if you don't have a vision, it is impossible to develop effective policies, procedures,

and strategies targeted toward a future goal and aligned to provide consistent

implementation of programs" (p. 7). Senge (1990) said, "you cannot have a learning

organization without a shared vision" (p. 209). Further, Huffman and Hipp proposed the

"vision for school improvement emerges when it is characterized by an undeviating focus

on student learning" (211). Organizational vision inspires action (Gruenert & Whitaker,

2015). Finally, Kanold (2011) believed that a lack of clarity regarding vision is a

fundamental barrier to PLCs. On the other hand, a clear vision is key to the stability of

PLCs and teacher collaboration. Huffman and Hipp (2003) believed that creating a

school vision is an integral component of the change process. The school vision is not

the sole property of the teachers and administration. "In most cases, mission and vision

statements result from a collaborative, inclusive development process that may include

students, parents, and community members, in addition to administrators and teachers"

(Abbott, 2014). Specifically, the school vision is created on behalf of and representative

of both the internal and external stakeholders, thus becoming a shared vision.

Unquestionably, when teachers begin working together collaboratively under the same

vision and a common mission, the culture of the school begins to change. Consequently,

a clear vision and a focused mission are prerequisites to successful teacher collaboration

and teacher leadership (Huffman & Hipp, 2003). The principal fosters teacher

collaboration by ingraining the mission and vision into the school culture.

PLCs and Building a Collaborative Culture

The sole purpose of building a collaborative culture is to ensure that all activities are focused and centered on student achievement (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2006). Eaker (1998) quoted Eastwood and Seashore-Louis (1992, p. 215) as follows: "Creating a collaborative culture has been described as 'the single most important factor' for successful school improvement initiatives and the first order of business for those seeking to enhance the effectiveness of their school." On the other hand, Jessie (2007) believed, "Building and maintaining a collaborative culture is one of the most difficult aspects of a PLC" (p. 2). Kanold (2011) thought that the voice of the vision must win the day in a PLC, and once built, the vision is kept alive through the collaborative environment. Therefore, the goal of PLCs is to build collaborative teams within a culture that is focused on achieving high-academic performance. However, DuFour et al. (2006) explained that a collaborative culture is not merely teams coming together and engaging in discussion about students but rather a collaborative culture is one that is focused on the "right" work. The right work refers to members of a team agreeing to consistently discuss instructional strategies and decisions that enhance student achievement at higher levels academically, thus supporting the intended mission of the school (DuFour et al., 2006). Once, established, the [mission] and vision become the voice of authority for work and action (Kanold, 2011). Therefore, if educators are expected to work collaboratively and achieve the intended mission, those working within a collaborative team must understand this expectation (DuFour et al., 2006).

The difference between a PLC's collaborative culture and a team is the interdependence that exists within a PLC. Instead of teachers simply sharing data, they respond to data, which requires a sense of mutual accountability and changing classroom

practices (DuFour et al., 2006; Jessie 2007).

> Professional learning is embedded in the culture of a PLC as staff members learn from one another and attend workshops and other outside professional development offerings, operating on the premise that no one of them individually is smarter than all of them collectively. (Jessie, 2007, p.1)

Little (1982) theorized that teacher collaboration is the result of four specific behaviors: teachers constantly talking about the practice of teaching; teachers observing other teachers with follow-up suggestions of improvement; teachers working together when planning, designing, evaluating, and preparing instructional materials; and teachers teaching and sharing with their colleagues about the practice of teaching. Further, Little (2003) suggested that PLCs are environments where new information and content are created and where present philosophies and expectations about education, community, teaching, and learning are challenged and evaluated.

Teacher collaboration is supported by the four areas of teaching: what, how, why and who (Palmer, 2007). "What identifies the curriculum being taught and how identifies the methods utilized to present the content more efficiently" (Palmer, 2007, p. 4). The third and fourth areas, the why and who of teaching, form the framework of the inner core of effective teaching. "Why explains the reasons appropriate instructional methods were chosen by the teacher, and who identifies the person who is teaching" (Palmer, 2007, p. 7).

While there are numerous and varying viewpoints on teacher collaboration, there exists parallel thoughts and common agreements on what is fundamental to a culture of collaboration. Little (1982) and Palmer (2007) concurred on the importance of teachers constantly talking about the practice of teaching and talking about the appropriateness of

instructional methods in collaborative teams. Further, both experts agree on the importance of teachers working together planning the "what and how" of teaching through designing, evaluating, and preparing instructional materials. Also in results-oriented PLCs, assessment of programs and initiatives must be ongoing and common formative assessments are vital. The focus is not necessarily on the teacher whose performance indicators are low but more so on creating an atmosphere where the success of others can be shared and replicated (Jessie, 2007, p. 2). Collaborative teams may be structured in various forms such as same course or grade level, vertical teams, electronic teams, and interdisciplinary teams (DuFour et al., 2006).

Same course or grade-level teams. DuFour et al. (2006) stated that structuring a team to foster the same course or grade level is simple and the best team structure. Same-course and grade-level teams include teachers who teach the exact same course or grade level. The same-course and grade-level format is simple and thought to be the best structure because the teachers understand the content that is expected to be taught and the teachers have a similar interest in regards to seeking the underlying questions as it relates to learning (DuFour et al, 2006). Although same-course and grade-level teams maybe considered the best team structure, there are instances where a teacher may be the only teacher within a school teaching a specific course or grade level. In such an instance, DuFour et al. (2006) suggested that vertical teams would be a possible structure.

Vertical teams. Vertical teams are a group of teachers who teach content both above or below students they teach. In addition, vertical teams may reach beyond the school's culture of community and include teachers from other schools who teach a similar grade level or content. Vertical teams foster the type of support that involves continuous communication from others within the team that discuss factors and strategies

towards improved student achievement. The benefit of vertical teaming, in an effective PLC, is that members within the team offer suggestions to those members who may teach a grade level above or below the grade level being taught, but also teachers have the benefit of improving their own instructional delivery to ensure content is being presented in an effective manner to improve student learning (DuFour et al., 2006). In addition, DuFour et al. (2006) stated that vertical teams collaborate within a school culture to specify and agree upon the main outcomes that students in identified grade levels should possess, create assessments for students in specified grade levels, analyze and assess data of created assessments, and collaborate and develop strategies for improving results on assessments.

Electronic teams. Electronic teams offer another format of ensuring a collaborative culture. Using technology to connect with other teachers across the state, district, or school is also a valuable option of implementing an effective PLC. Blanchard (2007) stated that "There is no reason that time and distance should keep people from interacting as a team. With proper management and the help of technology, virtual teams can be every bit as productive and rewarding as face-to-face teams" (p. 173). Therefore, the same expectations and purpose for creating collaborative teams are the same for an electronic team; the only difference is that electronic teams require that you communicate with team members electronically. In essence, the very fact that a teacher is the only teacher within a school that may teach a specific grade level or content area does not prohibit effectively collaborating.

Interdisciplinary teams. An interdisciplinary team is a team that has several members who teach in various content areas, grade levels, and courses. An interdisciplinary team's structure within a PLC can be an effective form of a

collaborative team. However, specific steps must be followed to ensure that true

collaboration in regards to discussing information in relation to improving student

learning and achievement is at the forefront and remains the focus. Ensuring specific

steps are followed when implementing interdisciplinary teams is important because it is

very easy for members of an interdisciplinary team to yield to discussing students only,

and this is because it is the one thing members share that is the same (DuFour et al.,

2006). Therefore, the following steps are integral in the success of implementing

interdisciplinary teams:

1. Identify an underlying goal that members will collaborate to achieve.

2. Ensure the schedule fosters time within the school's schedule for team

   members to meet with the content area teachers and grade level teams that are

   specific to the content area or grade level the members teach.

3. Remain focused on improving the students overall academic achievement

   (DuFour et al, 2006).

In summary, creating a collaborative culture within a PLC is a very important

measure that must be infused within the culture of a school to ensure student achievement

is at the forefront. Although collaborative teams may assume many formats, successful

schools understand that the key to creating and sustaining a collaborative culture is to

ensure that all members within the culture work together to achieve the common goal,

improved student achievement. The guiding questions below are the building blocks for

the implementation of an effective PLC and culture of collaboration. When these

questions can be agreed upon and answered by the principal, teachers, students and

stakeholders, student achievement will improve and learning environments will offer

sustainability for continued and ongoing growth: what do we want students to know; if a

student knows what we taught, how will we know; what are the processes in the school to address if a student is not learning; and what are the processes in the school to address if a student is learning (DuFour, 2004).

The Role of the Principal in Fostering a Collaborative Culture

A collaborative culture is fostered, sustained, or maybe even hindered in direct relations to the actions, support, or lack thereof from the principal. Changing a school's culture to reflect a collaborative culture is difficult because the change requires members within the school to adjust the beliefs and practices of what they have always done; members are required to build effective relationships with students and other members within the school; and members are expected to refrain from jumping on the bandwagon of a "quick fix" of a new program or textbook in education, but rather work interdependently with members within the school to foster a new approach to teaching students (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). DuFour and Marzano (2011) believed creating effective, high-performing collaborative teams requires the following seven components: ensuring the staff are appropriately placed on a team, embedding time within the instructional schedule for teams to collaborate, providing ongoing support to ensure teams are formed, agreeing and providing clear expectations of outcomes of a team, actively monitoring and providing guidance to teams, refraining from implementing an abbreviated team process, and celebrating accomplishments while addressing members of the team who do not uphold agreed upon tasks.

DuFour and Marzano (2011) defined a collaborative team as a collective group of members within a school working to accomplish specified goals. Though the team compilation may vary from school to school (vertical teams, interdisciplinary teams, district-wide teams, electronic teams, and course or grade-level teams), the focused work

does not change. DuFour and Fullan (2013) suggested that high-performing teams are more than simply a gathering of team members for discussion, and the importance of placing members in teams is a very important step. When teams work interdependently, members on the team hold one another accountable; therefore, the systematic process of placing members in teams must be taken seriously. When taken seriously, common goals that are agreed upon and achieved can be applied to school and classrooms, which is a benefit of meaningful collaborative teams (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). An additional benefit from appropriately placing members in teams, as suggested by DuFour and Fullan, is "shared responsibility" because members of the team continue to seek additional strategies to improve instructional presentation and student learning. In the absence of shared responsibility, a focus on improved instructional practice and working towards common goals, meaningful teams will struggle to exist because teams will engage in discussions that are not focused on improving student achievement (Gallimore, Emerling, Saunders, & Goldenburg, 2009).

In high-performing collaborative teams, time is set aside time during the school day for teams to meet and collaborate. Creating a common time within the instructional schedule requires planning, but the following are suggested strategies for finding time for members of a collaborative team to meet: specific time for preparation, creating a parallel schedule, adjusting the reporting and ending time of teachers, combining classes, holding assemblies and group lessons, designating time for team professional development, and meeting during scheduled faculty meetings (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Only the building principal has the authority and the resources to allot time during the academic day for collaborative planning; however, principals stamp the seal of importance on collaboration by allotting time during the day for teacher collaboration and

for collective inquiry. While common planning time for team members can sometimes become a scheduling nightmare for principals, the benefits reaped from this intentional scheduling far outweigh the potential headaches. DuFour and Marzano (2011) suggested that student achievement improves when teachers focus on best practices, instructional presentation, and results-oriented outcomes.

Thirdly, providing ongoing support to teams is an important component in cultivating high-performing teams. DuFour and Fullan (2013) asserted that even in the presence of clear evidence of the need to change how to teach students to improve student learning, educators will still struggle to affect change if a system of support is not created to gain additional insight and knowledge. In essence, transparency yields positive discomfort among educators, but it must be balanced by a collaborative approach that provides educators with a systematic process to learn and grow professionally while working with others within their school, district, and others from outside their school or district (DuFour & Fullan, 2013). Providing ongoing support to teams is beneficial to all; and as a result, high-performing teams of educators are formed. DuFour and Fullan further asserted that although assessments provide valuable data in regards to how students learn, the data gleaned from assessments will not improve student achievement if ongoing support is not fostered for continued growth of educators.

Effective leaders will ensure that collaboration is occurring among teams. Elmore (2003) suggested that unless the "right kind" of goal is obtained by collaborative teams, the likelihood of improved student learning and professional growth is minimal. In an effort to provide ongoing support, teams must select the goals that the team agrees to accomplish, members must be sure of what the goals are for the team, what is expected of each member of the team to accomplish set goals, and what measures will be used to

assess the progress towards achieving specified goals (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

The fourth component of creating effective, high-performing collaborative teams is providing clear expectations of outcomes of the team. The importance of having a clear purpose for collaboration is significant. The mission and vision statements help create unity of purpose, thus allowing the team to formulate goals based on data. Without a clear purpose, team members flounder, side step the purpose, and create their own agendas based on individual teacher needs, not collective purpose. The principal has the responsibility of ensuring that the team has shared beliefs and shared goals. Carroll, Fulton, and Doerr (2010) proposed that when teachers work collaboratively with the administration and maintain the focus on student achievement, reform occurs.

Actively monitoring and providing guidance to teams are necessary components for maintaining a culture of collaboration. Effective leaders provide guidance by ensuring that a timeline is created to meet the agreed-upon outcomes. When a timeline is created, teams understand what is expected and when the outcomes must be accomplished. Katzenbach and Smith (2003) stated that "Without discrete team work-products produced through the joint, real contributions of team members, the promise of incremental or magnified performance impact goes untapped" (p. 90).

An effective PLC requires that leaders ensure implementation with fidelity and that members refrain from seeking ways to circumvent steps towards effective implementation. Implementing the collaborative team process without abbreviating steps is not only important to ensuring that collaborative teams engage in dialogue but that effective implementation of the collaborative team process builds capacity among teachers as they work collaboratively. The members of a collaborative team must engage in dialogue where knowledge is shared (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). DuFour and Fullan

(2013) further suggested that implementing teams requires a consistent and continuous process that fosters a culture of support and systems that are supportive to the success of what team members are being asked to do. To ensure the implementation of the team process and to promote the success of others, the following questions must be addressed:

1. What obstacles are present that hinder progress of a team?

2. What support and/or resources are needed to promote continued progress?

3. What are the identified examples of the progress the team made towards reform, and how is it celebrated?

4. How and what steps are needed to improve individual and team confidence to move to the next identified challenge (DuFour & Fullan, 2013)?

As a result, Heath and Heath (2010) asserted that leaders who celebrate successes and improvements within a team create hope and "hope is precious to a change effort" (p. 141).

Lastly, high-performing collaborative teams celebrate accomplishments while addressing members of the team who do not support the assigned team. DuFour and Marzano (2011) stated that it is impossible to establish consistency of a collaborative team if there is not celebration of the efforts and progress made toward accomplishments. Therefore, embedded in the culture of an effective school is the appreciation of the members within the environment who contribute to the overall progress and success of the team's goals. However, just as members within the school are appreciated for contributing to the success of the team's goals, leaders must hold members within a school who are not contributing to the success of the team accountable (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). In addition, Lencioni (2005) indicated that leaders "who don't have the courage to force team members to step up to the requirements of teamwork" (p. 77)

should avoid the collaborative team concept completely.

As stated in the earlier premise, teacher collaboration is fostered when principals create the right environment and structure the appropriate systems for success. It is safe to assert that when principals foster teacher collaboration, the aforementioned seven components are apparent and embedded within the culture. With such an environment in place, it may be safe to suppose that student success is inevitable.

After working with more than 150 teams over an 8-year period, Dukewits and Godwin (1996) as cited in DuFour and Eaker (1998), hypothesized that effective teams are characterized by

1. Shared beliefs and attitudes.

2. High levels of trust that in turn result in open communication, mutual respect for people and opinions, and a willingness to participate.

3. The belief that they had the authority to make important decisions and a willingness to assume responsibility for the decisions they made.

4. Effectively managed meetings with clear operational norms and ground rules, agendas developed with input from all, defined roles for members, and minutes to provide continuity.

5. Ongoing assessment of and discussions regarding the functioning of the team.

6. Fostering building trust amongst teachers and the school environment (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, p. 121).

Hirsh and Hord (2008) noted that for school-wide success of PLCs, the following five criteria must be present: collaborative leadership amongst principal and teacher, a united vision, collaborative working environment, meaningful learning, and a willingness to learn and implement learning together. The principal is responsible for ensuring that

the sharing of leadership is evident within the school culture (Hirsh & Hord, 2008).

In 2008, Hord and Hirsh noted that the following attributes of a principal support an effective and sustainable PLC: promoting in a positive manner that success is possible, supporting continuous professional learning through updated knowledge, supporting teacher leadership, ensuring data is used to foster decision making, modeling how to effectively engage in meaningful discussions, and sharing research with teachers to increase understanding. In fostering a collaborative culture, the principal must model learning. Wilhelm (2010) revealed that a principal who is the lead learner in the school is typically found engaging in professional development side-by-side with the teachers, modeling a high degree of engagement and participation, and spearheading discussions. Further, Wilhelm discussed the importance of the lead learner's presence during team meetings because they realize how critical it is to be the learning leader whenever their teacher leaders are collaborating. The principal's absence may signal his/her disinterest in the work, for which the teachers have all developed passion and urgency.

In summary, Little (1982), Kruse, Louis, and Bryk (1994), Dukewits and Godwin (1996), DuFour and Eaker (1998), Marzano, Waters, McNulty, (2005), and Hirsch and Hord (2008) all have intersecting philosophies on the significance of a united and shared vision, clear purpose, and expectations. Additionally, Little, Dukewits and Godwin, Marzano et al., and Hirsch and Hord concurred that trust, open communication, and mutual willingness to learn together help solidify a collaborative culture. Finally, Newman and Wehlage (1995) and Dukewits and Godwin gave credence to the value of teachers' willingness to take responsibility for decision making and student learning. The principal's role as lead learner is to facilitate all of the variables explained in this section of the literature review. The principal must model the learning and behaviors that are

expected of the team members. In order for that to happen, s/he must be passionately involved in PLCs, model learning, and how to effectively engage in meaningful discussions with the teachers (Hirsh & Hord, 2008).

Shared Leadership

Within the context of PLCs, the principals' actions influence the collaborative teams, which in turn influence the actions of the individual teachers, and finally, the teachers' actions influence student achievement (DuFour & Eaker, 2007). When schools become PLCs, the principal is able to work smarter and meet the needs of the teachers more effectively and expediently. DuFour and Eaker (2007) stated that "the PLC process provides a vehicle that allows principals to execute a number of the responsibilities of school leadership in an integrated and focused fashion" (p. 52). As stated earlier, the responsibilities of principals are immense. Marzano et al. (2005) identified a list of 21 principal responsibilities and roles that are supported by research. DuFour and Eaker (2007) declared that of the 21 responsibilities, 19 "naturally have a home" (p.53) in PLCs. The indispensable responsibilities follow.

1. Providing affirmation and celebration of staff effort and achievement.

2. Challenging the status quo as a change agent.

3. Establishing processes to ensure effective communication throughout the school.

4. Sharing the assumptions, beliefs, expectations and habits that constitute the school's culture.

5. Demonstrating the flexibility in meeting the different needs of teams and being willing to make modifications to school procedures.

6. Focusing on clear goals and relentlessly pursing the school's purpose and

priorities.

7. Articulating the ideals and beliefs that drive the day-to-day work of the school.

8. Soliciting input from staff in the design and implementation of procedures and policies.

9. Engaging staff in the ongoing review and discussion of the most promising practices for improving student learning.

10. Participating in the design and implementation of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

11. Demonstrating interest in and knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment.

12. Creating processes to provide ongoing monitoring of school's practices and their effect on student learning.

13. Creating the conditions that optimize school improvement efforts.

14. Establishing clear procedures and orderly routines.

15. Serving as a spokesperson and advocate for the school and staff.

16. Establishing a positive working relationship with each member of the staff.

17. Providing teachers with the resources, materials, and support to help them succeed at what they are being asked to do.

18. Recognizing the undercurrents of the informal organizations of the school and using that information to be proactive in addressing problems and concerns.

19. Being visible throughout the school and having positive interactions with staff and students (Marzano et al., 2005).

When analyzing the massive responsibilities of the principal, it is clear that no

single person can achieve all of the demands alone. "The principalship as a monarchy, holding sole responsibility for all important decisions–with the 'princes and princesses' (individual teachers) in their sovereign classrooms engaging in private practice – is an outdated and insufficient model today" (Wilhelm, 2010, p. 22). Kouzes and Posner (2003) could not find a single example of extraordinary achievement that occurred without the active involvement and support of many people. As effective PLCs are developed, the focus on the teacher as a leader in the school environment must also develop (DuFour & DuFour, 2012).

Helterbran (2010) argued that although there is plenty of data supporting teacher leadership, it remains a topic of discussion; and although some progress has been made, teacher leadership remains more of a concept than a certainty. Teachers have always been leaders to some extent, yet there is little indication that a concentrated, collaborative movement exists in public school to promote widespread teacher leadership. Decades ago, Bahn (1947) challenged school administrators to create a culture that would motivate teachers to explore their leadership abilities through resourcefulness and experiences. Nonetheless, the data shows that a combination of principal and teacher leadership is a logical, rational, and productive model for school improvement. Recent reforms failed because many schools continue to utilize the traditional form of leadership instead of embracing teachers for the expertise, energy, and influence on the community (Helterbran, 2010).

"I am just a teacher" is the statement many teachers embrace when confronted with the idea of leadership (Helterbran, 2010). Teacher leadership can only thrive in a school culture that embraces change, respect, hard work, and success (Danielson, 2006, p. 126). Shared leadership provides consistency and stability and is essential for academic

improvement (Printy & Marks, 2006). According to Bass and Riggio (2006), transformational leadership involves "inspiring followers to commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support" (p. 4).

Louis and Kruse (1995) stated that supportive leadership from principals is a necessary resource for school-based PLCs because it is a necessity to developing teacher leaders. When teacher leaders develop, the learning environment can flourish because leadership is shared and embedded in the culture of the school which promotes a sense of value and belonging to the teachers within the school (Hord, 1997a).

> Highly effective principals maintain a balancing act of "stepping up" (being more directive as needed), and 'stepping back' (acting more in a guiding role as appropriate). Over time, a principal who intentionally balances leadership in this way creates a high-functioning team of teacher leaders who, in turn, become increasingly effective, leading their own teams of colleagues. (Wilhelm, 2010, p. 24)

When teachers begin taking ownership alongside administrators for problems of poor achievement, they also gain ownership of the solutions developed as a team. "This does not happen overnight, and it does not happen through the strategy of abdication and hoping" (Wilhelm, 2010, p. 38).

Jessie (2007) explicated that the principal's role in a PLC is to identify people's talents, aspirations, and skills and to showcase them appropriately. "The goal is to leave a legacy of leaders, not to create a legacy for yourself" (Jessie, 2007, p. 2). It is conclusive from the literature that the principal's actions and behaviors before, during,

and after the implementation of PLCs serve to foster teacher collaboration. If implemented with fidelity, a culture of collaboration almost assuredly ensues and may indeed guarantee improved student achievement and school reform.

Summary

In this age of accountability and educational reform, stakeholders continue to seek the best possible education for children attending public schools. NCLB and RTTT may have failed to address fully public concerns about education. Many experts believe that PLCs may be the answer for the type of educational reform stakeholders are seeking. In PLCs, teachers work as a team to ensure that every student learns, as student learning is the priority for all team members. District M was fortunate to provide each principal in the district with PLC training because of the district's participation in a U.S. Department of Education grant. Principals in District M were expected to implement with fidelity PLCs within their schools. Understanding that teacher collaboration is a key component of PLCs, principals must create the right environment and culture to foster effective teacher collaboration and ultimately shared leadership. The purpose of this research was to answer whether principals in District M foster teacher collaboration and ultimately teacher leadership in PLCs. This study sought to identify behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership.

Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the research design and the methodology used in this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings, while Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings in relation to the related literature. Additionally, Chapter 5 includes implications for future research and practice.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The responsibilities of principals in the 21st century are increasingly demanding. But the current social and educational context-which combines high-stakes accountability and the high ideals of supporting, physical and emotional needs of children-demands that all principals demonstrate the vision, courage, and skill to lead and advocate for effective learning communities in which all students reach their highest potential. (NAESP, 2008, p. 11)

The current literature shows that PLCs significantly help build internal capacity and help change the school culture through collaborative teams or PLCs. The primary focus of PLCs is student learning and achievement.

Nevertheless, as put forward by DuFour and Marzano (2011),

perhaps the biggest mistake leaders make when attempting to create a collaborative culture within the school is to assign teachers and principals into groups and encourage them to collaborate–with little direction or support . . . the likelihood that people who have worked in isolation their entire career will suddenly discover how to collaborate as a team . . . is extremely remote. (p. 47)

Simply assigning teachers to teams and asking them to collaborate is like putting students into groups and expecting cooperative learning to occur; notably, teachers on a typical leadership team may represent a wide range of readiness levels when it comes to assuming leadership roles (Wilhelm, 2010). Likewise, the supposition that principals understand how to foster teacher collaboration in PLCs as well as the supposition that teachers comfortably collaborate and share leadership roles in the presence of the principal may be erroneous.

This research study sought to answer whether or not principals in District M foster teacher collaboration and ultimately teacher leadership in PLCs and secondly to capture the identifiable behaviors on the part of the principals that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership in PLCs. According to the American Educational Research Association (2014), validity is the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretation of the data obtained. To help ensure the validity of this study, a pilot study was conducted to validate the construct validity of the interview questions. The purpose of the pilot study was to determine the extent to which the proposed interview questions would capture the important aspects of the study, were comprehensible and were free of distortion, and would provide empirical evidence sought by the researcher (American Educational Research Association, 2014). Further, a pilot study is a small scale preliminary study conducted to improve upon the study design prior to performance of the full-scale research study (Hulley, 2007).

The pilot study was conducted during the fall of 2015 at a select school in the district. The select school was chosen because it is the home school of the main researcher; and to eliminate bias in the study, this school is the only school in the district that did participate in the actual study. Five teachers from this school were selected to participate in the pilot study: three female teachers and two male teachers. Three teachers hold bachelor degrees and two teachers hold master's degrees. All of the teachers taught in the school district for 5 or more years. While all of the teachers in this study now teach at the select middle school, one teacher taught at the high school level for 7 years and taught for 6 years at the elementary level; two teachers taught at the elementary level for 8 years and taught at the high school level for 4 years; one teacher taught 3 years in a private elementary school, 7 years at a public elementary school, and 6

years at the high school level; and one teacher taught high school for 3 years and taught

elementary school for 4 years. Overall, the participants represented over 20 years of

teaching experience in three different schools in the district. These five teachers were

purposefully selected because they possess a variety of teaching experience at the

elementary, middle, and high school level. A list of years of experience per teacher was

obtained from the human resources department. The five teachers met in the conference

room at the school with one of the five teachers leading the meeting. Collectively, they

decided to select the teacher with the most experience to lead the meeting. The teachers

carefully analyzed the wording and the meaning of each question to ensure clarity and

usability. Based on the pilot study results, the researcher modified six of the 14

questions. Table 1 shows the original and modified items before and after the pilot study.

Table 1

Six Items Modified by Teachers in Pilot Study

Original Items – Before Pilot Study	Modified Items – After Pilot Study
1: What were some characteristics of the PLCs at your school?	1: What are some defining characteristics of the PLCs in your school?
2: What are the focuses of your PLC?	2: What is/are the foci of your PLC?
7: What systems are in place to foster successful teacher collaboration? Who is responsible for the systems?	7: What systems (time for PLCs training, resources, support, etc.) are in place to foster successful teacher collaboration? Who is responsible for putting the systems in place?
8: What happens with collaboration among teachers when the principal is present at PLC meeting?	8: What happens to the culture of collaboration among teachers when your principal is present and participates in PLCs?
10: How does school principals foster open communication about PLCs in meeting?	10: How does your principal foster open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs?
11: Did teachers freely voice their opinions when the principal were present?	11: How do the teachers freely voice their opinions when the principal participate in PLC?

Research Questions

Butin (2010) believed that *what, why,* and *how* questions best serve research studies that are grounded in exploration. This study is exploratory in design and used narrative research. With Butin's belief in mind and after an extensive review of the literature, the following research questions were developed. The questions below guided

the study.

Central question. How does principal participation in PLCs foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership in PLCs?

Subquestion. What are identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership?

The questions for the one-on-one interviews follow.

Interview questions.

1. What are the defining characteristics of the PLCs in your school?

2. What is/are the foci of your PLCs?

3. How does your principal participate in PLCs?

4. How does your principal and PLC team connect the school's mission, vision, and goals to the work of the PLCs?

5. How does your principal foster teacher collaboration during PLCs?

6. How does your principal create the conditions and/or environment for successful teacher collaboration (before, during, after PLCs)?

7. What systems (time for PLCs, training, resources, support, etc.) are in place to foster successful teacher collaboration? Who is responsible for putting the systems in place?

8. What happens to the culture of collaboration among teachers when your principal is present and participates in PLCs? Does the presence of the principal influence team culture or team collaboration during PLCs? How? Does the culture of collaboration change when the principal participates in PLCs? How?

9. How does your principal encourage teachers to challenge the status quo?

10. How does your principal foster open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs?

11. How do the teachers freely voice their opinions when the principal participates in PLCs? Why or why not?

12. How does your principal foster shared leadership during PLCs?

13. How do you perceive that the PLC team feels empowered to make decisions that directly impact the quality of student learning when the principal participates in PLCs, or do the teachers wait on the principal to guide them and tell them what to do? Explain your answer.

14. What are identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership?

Research Methodology

One-on-one interviews, a form of narrative research, are a popular research methodology for data collection as they are concrete and provide a simple method for collecting pertinent data (Butin, 2010). It is a process in which the researcher asks questions and records responses from only one participant at a time (Creswell, 2012). Narrative research uses field notes and texts from interviews (in this case) to create meaning. The components of narrative research used in this study follow one-on-one interviews, individual teacher experiences from PLCs, and coding of themes (Creswell, 2012). The interview process was selected for this study because it lends itself to the collection and interpretation of data from the point of view of the respondents. An important advantage to one-on-one interviews is that the researcher has a chance to study body language and expressions and pose follow-up questions as appropriate (Butin, 2010).

In qualitative research, the intent is not to generalize to a population; therefore, qualitative researchers purposefully select individuals and sites that best help them understand the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). In this study, purposeful sampling was used when selecting the participants. The purposeful sample pool includes all teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools. From the sample pool, five elementary teachers, five middle school teachers, and five high school teachers were selected to take part in two sessions of one-on-one structured interviews. Only teachers whose principal participated in the full implementation of the U.S. Department of Education grant written by the South Carolina University were eligible for participation in this research. The researcher obtained a list of all teachers in the county by grade level in order to select the pool of potential participants. The researcher cut names of teachers into strips. The names were placed in hats designated by grade level. The researcher drew five names from each level in order to identify potential participants of the study.

In order to ensure validity, each one of the interviewees received the same questions during the two sessions. Specifically, questions 1-7 were asked during session one, whereas questions 8-14 were asked during session two. Question 14 requested the interviewee to identify the behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership (see Appendix A). All interview sessions were audio recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed for patterns and themes.

Research Context and Cite

This study took place in a rural public school district in South Carolina. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) posited that the population of a research project should consist of those individuals who possess special characteristics; the common characteristic of the population selected for this research study is that all interviewees teach in schools led by

principals who took part in the U.S. Department of Education grant written by a South Carolina University.

In 2011, District M took part in a U.S. Department of Education grant, written and implemented by a small yet prestigious university located in central South Carolina. The goal of the grant was to build internal capacity in select struggling, rural, low-wealth school districts in South Carolina by providing ongoing professional development and mentoring to the principals. Toward that end, the university hired five mentors to implement the grant. The five mentors, all retired principals or superintendents, had experienced success in school reform during their careers.

The grant implementation phase began in the 2011 school year. PLC training was the underlying focus of the monthly professional development activities for the principals with the expectation and requirement that each principal would go back to his or her school and implement PLCs with fidelity. The training presented to the principals was based on the research of Rebecca and Richard DuFour. By design, the monthly trainings evolved into system-wide principal PLCs. In addition to the monthly principal PLCs, the mentors visited each principal mentee monthly in order to support the district-wide initiative. The grant terminated at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. After 4 years of training, the assumption was that principals in District M fully understood how to plan and implement PLCs as one vehicle for school reform.

Sampling Procedures and Participants

District M serves 5,200 students in grades prekindergarten through 12. The district has four elementary schools and 93 elementary teachers, three middle schools and 90 middle school teachers, and three high schools and 113 high school teachers. Overall, the district employs 296 teachers. The ethnic makeup of the teachers is as follows: 162

Caucasian, 122 African-American, one American Indian, and 12 Asian. Purposeful sampling allows for the inclusion of those teachers who were able to provide the most useful information and who could best help the researcher understand the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012).

In qualitative research, there is no set sample size. The suggested guidelines explain that it is typical to study a few individuals as the ability to provide an in-depth picture of the data lessens as the number of participants increases (Creswell, 2012). The sample pool included all teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools. From the pool, five elementary teachers, five middle school teachers, and five high school teachers were selected to take part in two one-on-one structured interviews. Only teachers whose principal participated in the full implementation of the U.S. Department of Education grant written by the South Carolina University were eligible for participation in this research.

Research Questions

Central question. How does principal participation in PLCs foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership in PLCs?

Subquestion. What are identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership?

Preliminary Procedures Prior to Research Study

A letter was sent to the superintendent of District M requesting permission to conduct the study (see Appendix B). Upon receiving permission to conduct the study from the superintendent of District M, the following step-by-step procedures were utilized.

The superintendent's office sent a letter to each principal in the district explaining

the study and timeline and affirming Board of Education permission to conduct the study.

With the assistance of district-level staff, the researcher obtained a list of all teachers in

the county by grade level in order to select the pool of potential participants. Once

selection was completed, a prenotice email was sent to each of the selected teachers

requesting their participation (see Appendix C). This notice was sent 15 days prior to the

interviews explaining the purpose of the request, the level of preapproval by the district,

the eligibility criteria, and the scheduled dates and location of scheduled interviews as

well as the procedures for conducting the research. Participants were asked to respond

within 5 days indicating acceptance. If a selected participant declined participation, the

next randomly selected name was contacted for participation. A follow-up/request/

reminder was sent to each participant via email 5 days prior to each session (see

Appendix D).

      The data collection period was the fall of 2015. Each interview session took place

in the conference room at District M's district office. This location was selected because

it provides a central location for all selected participants. All responses were audiotaped

in order to ensure validity and to assist the researcher in maintaining focus on the

conversations (Butin, 2010).

      Reliability indicates that the researcher's approach is consistent across different

researchers and different projects (Gibbs, 2007, as cited in Creswell, 2009). All of the

aforementioned procedures were implemented with fidelity. During each interview

session, the researcher read a detailed account of the focus of the study, the researcher's

role, the basis for selection of each interviewee, and the context from which the data

would be gathered (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; see Appendix E).

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained. Once the study had been approved by the IRB, a copy was provided to the superintendent of the district. Informed consent forms were given to the teachers via electronic email (see Appendix F). Next, the researcher collected all informed consent forms as a matter of record. The initial email invitation explained the purpose of the research study. Participation in the study was strictly on a voluntary basis and remained anonymous. Participants had the freedom to discontinue participation in the study should the need arise at any time during the study. At the conclusion of the study, participants were provided a summary of the results of the study if requested.

Participants did not receive any monetary compensation in exchange for their participation in the study; however, participants may benefit from the study in the following ways. First, the study may provide teachers with valuable information and awareness on how collaboration can affect the school culture and the quality of student work. Second, teachers may gain insight into how administrative participation in PLCs benefits the school as a whole. Third, teachers may learn how to effectively conduct PLCs in ways that present positive results for student achievement.

Confidentially Procedures

Every response from the participants is considered confidential. All data collected will be kept for 5 years after the completion of this study. Confidential data were destroyed after the researcher defended the dissertation. The findings of this study may be published in professional journals or presented at professional meetings, but all participants will remain anonymous.

Data Analysis

The researcher read each transcribed document two times thoroughly for clarity and familiarity. Subsequent readings occurred in order to help craft a profile of themes and patterns (Serdman, 1991). The raw data were broken down into parts in order to identify patterns. Strauss and Corbin (1990) described this procedure as open coding. Open coding involves identifying conceptual categories and temporarily naming them for the observed group phenomena. For the purpose of this study, the following open coding system was used to further organize the collected data. The code RQ and a number indicated the specific research question being addressed. For example, data specific to Research Question 1 was coded RQ1 and electronically filed. Further, the letter E symbolizes that the responses came from elementary teachers, the letter M symbolizes that the responses came from middle school teachers, and the letter H symbolizes that the responses came from high school teachers. Therefore, the code RQ1E indicates that the data are in response to Research Question 1 and came from an elementary teacher.

Upon the completion of coding, data were organized by themes, patterns, and research questions and then assigned a tab in an electronic binder. An electronic binder is a free, online notebook or "live-binder" used by teachers for organizing and storing files (Mueller, 2011). The electronic binder is password protected. The researcher then analyzed the data for comprehensive findings. The findings are reported in Chapter 4.

Summary

Only teachers whose principal participated in the full implementation of the U.S. Department of Education grant written by the South Carolina University participated in this research. Data collection resulted from structured interviews using 14 interview questions. Data collection took place in the fall of 2015. The interview questions were

carefully worded to elicit a narrative response from each participant. Questions 1-7 were asked in session 1, and questions 8-14 were asked in session 2. All responses were audiotaped in order to assist the researcher in maintaining focus on the conversations (Butin, 2010).

To interpret and make sense of the data collected, the researcher transcribed the data and used a coded system. The open coding system helped the researcher identify conceptual categories. Finally, data were categorized by research question and themes for the purpose of further analyses. The findings of the raw data are reported in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The findings and statistical analyses are presented in this chapter. Data in this study were collected from 15 interviewees. An interview is a conversation between two or more people where questions are asked by the interviewer to elicit facts or statements from the interviewee (Seidman, 1998). All of the interviews were recorded by the interviewer and interpreted by the interviewer. Interviews are a standard part of qualitative research. Interviewing, when considered as a method for conducting qualitative research, is a technique used to understand the experiences of others. The qualitative research interview seeks to describe the meanings of central themes in the life world of the subjects. The main task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say regarding the questions solicited by the interviewee (Seidman, 1998).

The purpose of this study was to answer whether principals' participation in PLCs fostered teacher collaboration and teacher leadership. The following research questions guided this qualitative research study.

Central question. How do principals in District M foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership in PLCs?

Subquestion. What are the identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership?

The Statistical Analysis System (SAS) was used to analyze the data in this research study. Descriptive Statistics was used to summarize the descriptive data about the interviewees.

Summary Statistics

Presented in Table 2 are the summary statistics of the teachers who were interviewed for this research study. A total of 15 teachers were interviewed regarding PLCs at their schools. Females consisted of 80.0% of the interviewees and males consisted of 20% of the interviewees. The majority of the interviewees were White/Caucasian (60.0%). Black/African American represented 40.0% of the interviewees. The same percentage of interviewees were teaching at the elementary (33.3%), middle (33.3%), and high (33.3%) school levels.

Table 2

Characteristics of Interviewees

Variables	Number of Interviewees	Percent of Interviewees
Gender		
Female	12	80.0%
Male	3	20.0%
Racial Ethnicity		
Black/African American	6	40.0%
White/Caucasian	9	60.0%
School Level		
Elementary	5	33.3%
Middle	5	33.3%
High	5	33.3%

Overview of Methodology and Data Analysis Process

This qualitative research used one-on-one interviews, individual teacher experiences from PLCs, and coding of themes. Purposeful sampling was used when

selecting the participants to interview in this study. The sample pool consisted of 15 teachers: five elementary teachers, five middle school teachers, and five high school teachers. Only the teachers whose principal participated in the full implementation of the U.S. Department of Education grant written by the South Carolina University were included in in the purposeful sample pool.

Data from the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed into a word document. After the completion of interviews, the data were read thoroughly to determine themes and subthemes. Open coding was used to organize the collected data as follows. The code RQ and a number indicated the specific research question. For example, data specific to Research Question 1 were coded RQ1. Further, the coding system for this research used the letter E to symbolized responses from elementary teachers, the letter M was used to symbolize the responses from middle school teachers, and the letter H was used to symbolize the responses from high school teachers.

Research Question Section

In order to examine the features and impact of PLCs, 14 research questions were formulated and asked to 15 interviewees. The findings from this study follow.

Research Question 1: What are some defining characteristics of the PLCs in your school?

Table 3

Research Question 1 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ1: Verbatim Responses
RQ1E.	PLCs are a shared vision, establishing goals or objectives, and having a clear, concise mission.
RQ1E.	The defining characteristics of Professional Learning Communities of our school are centered on collaborative planning that is fueled by academic, social, and behavioral data. PLC expectations are customized according to teams, but the overall goals are the same, to provide the educator with a collaborative environment designed to improve student achievement.
RQ1E.	The PLCs defining characteristic is collaboration. We are provided with opportunities to work together to understand curriculum changes and outcomes to improve student achievement.
RQ1E.	PLC meetings at our school are collaborative, supportive, and goal oriented. It is great that these meetings are grade team specific so that when we have conversations about data and moving forward with instruction, we are all concerned about the same group of students.
RQ1E.	1. Held every Tuesday, 2. Facilitated by the Curriculum facilitator, 3. Structured for purpose, 4. Materials provided 5. Data-driven, 6. Various modes of delivery.
RQ1M.	New information, our PLCs normally consist of us getting new information, whether it is a professional development on a new instrument or gaining new information on implementing standards or technology.
RQ1M.	Some defining characteristics of PLCs in my school are; Collaborative teams - we meet as a team of teachers who teach the same students so we share common interest in the teaching and learning of those students. Commitment to improving learning - use data to inform our decisions to help students.
RQ1M.	Some of the defining characteristics of PLC's in our school are a positive collaborative culture, purpose/goal for the meetings, focus on improving students and student learning, data driven decision making/result orientation, teacher learning - learning by doing.
RQ1M.	The defining characteristics of PLC's in my school are that they are goal oriented, data driven and are group sessions.

Respondents	RQ1: Verbatim Responses
RQ1M.	The professional learning community is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement at our school. Shared decision making is a factor in curriculum reform and the transformation of teaching roles in our school. Also in our school, structured time is provided for teachers to work together in planning instruction, observing each other's classrooms, and sharing feedback.
RQ1H.	The defining characteristics of our PLC is centered on student progress in relation to the school and district's mission. The student progress tied to the school and district goals. The key concept of PLCs in our school revolve around three key ideas; 1. Focus on Student Learning 2. Collaborative Culture, and 3. Results Orientation. Our PLCs are based on these concepts working together to achieve desired results for the schools and district's goals and objectives.
RQ1H.	PLCs at our school is a learning community, where a group of teachers meet in a common place. It is based on collective inquiry of data, collaboration, action oriented and experimentation, shared vision, values, school mission, and goals to reach. Teachers make collective commitments clarifying what each member will do to create an organization, and they use results-oriented goals to mark their progress. Teachers have a common planning time to attend the PLCs. Each member maintains a notebook with all meeting agendas, list of at-risk students, common assessments, grade level expectations, and data used to monitor progress. Teams share agendas, minutes from meetings, and common assessment results with administrators.
RQ1H.	Teacher buy in, core values, research based, and innovation.
RQ1H.	Data driven decision making with teacher and principal collaboration.
RQ1H.	Shared goals - make decision to assist student learning and teaching practices. Adopt practical steps to put into place throughout school building. These and other attributes characterize professional learning communities at our school. Put simply, a professional learning community is a team of teachers who collaborate about how well teaching strategies and curriculum are working, and how well individual students are learning what they need to learn.

Summary of Research Question 1

Teachers defined the primary characteristic of PLCs in their schools as

collaborative. The collaborative school culture focused on improving students and

student learning by using data-driven decision making. A collaborative school

environment also provided teachers with the opportunities to work together to understand

curriculum changes and outcomes to improve student achievement. The teachers had shared goals and felt empowered to make decisions to assist student learning and teaching practices. In summary, PLC members worked collaboratively with a shared mission, vision, goal, and objectives. Elementary teachers were intensely focused on student achievement. Some focused on a specific group of students. Middle school teachers shared data. They also collaborated on decision making and feedback. High school teachers used their data to assess their strategies to see if the strategy yielded the results they sought.

Research Question 2: What are the foci of your PLC?

Table 4

Research Question 2 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ2: Verbatim Responses
RQ2E.	The defining characteristics of Professional Learning Communities of our school is centered on collaborative planning that is fueled by academic, social, and behavioral data.
RQ2E.	Our PLCs are focused on working as a team and discussing student achievement.
RQ2E.	PLC meetings at our school are collaborative, supportive, and goal oriented. It is great that these meetings are grade team specific so that when we have conversations about data and moving forward with instruction, we are all concerned about the same group of students.
RQ2E.	PLC expectations are customized according to teams, but the overall goals are the same, to provide the educator with a collaborative environment designed to improve student achievement.
RQ2E.	The focus of our PLCs are centered around students and we work collaboratively to discuss our students and how we can ensure our students are successful.
RQ2M.	• Facilitated by the Curriculum facilitator • Structured for purpose • Materials provided • Data-driven • Various modes of delivery
RQ2M.	New information is a foci of our PLCs. Our PLCs normally consist of us getting new information, whether it is a professional development on a new instrument or gaining new information on implementing standards or technology.
RQ2M.	Some defining characteristics of PLCs in my school are **Collaborative teams -** we meet as a team of teachers who teach the same students so we share common interest in the teaching and learning of those students. **Commitment to improving learning -** use data to inform our decisions to help students. **Shared goals -** make decision to assist student learning and teaching practices.
RQ2M.	Adopt practical steps to put into place throughout school building. Such as collaborative teams, commitment to improving learning, and shared goals.
RQ2M.	Our PLCs are focused on teaching and learning. Our principal also expects for us to keep students first.
RQ2H.	Some of the defining characteristics of PLCs in our school are a positive collaborative culture, purpose/goal for the meetings, focus on improving students and student learning, data driven decision making/result orientation, teacher learning - learning by doing.

(continued)

Respondents	RQ2: Verbatim Responses
RQ2H.	The defining characteristics of PLCs in my school are that they are goal oriented, data driven and are group sessions.
RQ2H.	The professional learning community is seen as a powerful staff development approach and a potent strategy for school change and improvement.
RQ2H.	In our school, PLCs, put simply, is a team of teachers who collaborate about how well teaching strategies and curriculum are working, how well individual students are learning what they need to learn, and to generate ideas on how to improve each student's performance.
RQ2H.	PLCs in my school foster shared decision making as a factor in curriculum reform and the transformation of teaching roles. Structured time is provided for teachers to work together in planning instruction, observing each other's classrooms, and sharing feedback.

Summary of Research Question 2

The foci of PLCs were to provide PLC teams with plans to reach academic excellence, to facilitate effective collaboration, and to address the concerns of the students. Middle and high school teachers accomplished this goal by sharing information, data, and other materials. A second focus was that PLCs used data-driven decision-making processes. Teachers implemented various interventions to increase student achievement. The third focus was centered around students and how teachers could help better service students. Elementary teachers also spent time discussing students who seemed to be struggling and shared ideas with each other as to what teachers should do to help those students. To that end, teachers in PLCs appeared to constantly assess their strategies and results based on available data.

Research Question 3. How does your principal participate in PLCs?

Table 5

Research Question 3 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ3: Verbatim Responses
RQ3E.	The principal's leadership is key in establishing PLCs. She establishes the vision, direction, and mission for the school.
RQ3E.	The principal provides the PLCs with an experienced, professional interpretation of data and relays how it drives and affects student achievement.
RQ3E.	Our principal facilitates PLCs in which she shares information and provide training on various topics throughout the year. For example, when we were learning about SMART goals and SLOs she scheduled sessions to ensure everyone knew what was expected.
RQ3E.	The principal also explains the expectations and goals for students and teachers in the academic year and monitors appropriate pacing.
RQ3E.	Our principal participates in PLCs in order to deliver data as it pertains to our school as a whole. She speaks with us about the data, what that means, and how it is viewed so that we as teachers have a better understanding of our school's performance.
RQ3M.	The principal participates in PLCs on an as needed basis since PLCs are facilitated by the Curriculum Facilitator.
RQ3M.	My principal is normally present and/facilitating in every PLC so it would be about biweekly that she is facilitating or observing a PLC.
RQ3M.	Principal participates in PLCs by leading a few sessions; observing a few sessions; helping with SLO process, and explaining and /offering suggestions on SLO items.
RQ3M.	The principal attends the PLC meeting on a regular basis. He participated by sharing statistical data with the committee that impacted the curriculum.
RQ3M.	My principal participates in PLC by being active with teachers when discussing items and being a great supporter.
RQ3H.	The principal truly lets the Curriculum Facilitator facilitate and lead PLCs. When new concepts are introduced or important information needs to be discussed as it pertains to new policies and procedures the principal leads said meetings and answers all questions, comments and concerns thoroughly.
RQ3H.	My principal provides the leadership regarding PLCs.
RQ3H.	My principal participates in PLCs by defining characteristics regarding restructuring of meetings, by sharing authority, and working with staff without dominating.

Respondents	RQ3: Verbatim Responses
RQ3H.	The principal is an active participant because she is a good listener and seeks to understand how to assist teachers to make them successful.
RQ3H.	My principal participates in PLCs by providing organization and focus points for each meeting. She relays current information and happenings within the state and district, and how it pertains to our school.

Summary of Research Question 3

The principals are definitely involved in a leadership capacity during PLCs. The principals provide the PLCs with professional interpretation of data and explain how the data effects student achievement. Principals also explain the expectations and goals for students and teachers in the academic year, and the principals monitor appropriate pacing. Principals establish the vision, direction, and mission for the schools and help link them to PLCs. Principals facilitate PLCs by sharing information and providing training on various topics throughout the year. Some principals participate in PLCs on an as-needed basis. Other principals participate in PLCs by providing organization and focus. Principals relay current education information and issues that happened within the district and state levels and explained how they pertain to their specific schools. The principals are willing to share authority and participate in PLCs without dominating.

Research Question 4: How do your principal and PLC team connect the school's mission, vision, and goals to work of the PLC?

Table 6

Research Question 4 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ4: Verbatim Responses
RQ4E.	She leads by example. She states the vision and goals of the school through face-to-face meetings with clear and concise objectives for the school established.
RQ4E.	Our school's mission, vision, and goals are connected to our PLCs by making sure evaluation of the whole child is administered and assessed. Adjustments and recommendations are expected to be made in order to ensure teachers are providing every student with the opportunity to become socially mature and academically productive citizens for life.
RQ4E.	The school's mission, vision and goals connects to the work of the PLCs by making sure information shared and discussed in the PLC is pertinent and relative to our school.
RQ4E.	Teachers are expected to monitor the academic, social, and behavioral growth of their students and analyze the findings as a collaborative group.
RQ4E.	The principal and teachers connect the vision and goals by having PLC meetings on a regular basis. The mission, vision, and goals are always discussed in each meeting.
RQ4M.	PLCs are data-driven, which means that all of the decisions that are made in the best interest of all students.
RQ4M.	During each PLC she will normally refer back to our school's mission statement, when she is explaining why we are discussing whatever topic we are working with that day.
RQ4M.	The mission, vision, and goals are posted in the PLC room, throughout the building, in weekly agendas, and in some PLC meetings; therefore, our principal participates by reminding us of our focus and holding us accountable.
RQ4M.	Our principal connects the school's mission, vision and goals to the work of the PLC by re-stating the school's overall mission, which is to enhance student achievement, throughout our school, but also ensuring that she supports strategies and suggestions that teachers believe will improve student performance.
RQ4M.	Everyone in the school is continuously turning our insights and learning into action. The members and or team begin to recognize the importance and value of testing new ideas, experience in learning and the significance of engagement thru our principal's direction.
RQ4H.	The Shared Mission and Vision statements are being used to put systems in place to help the students and the school advance through data and discussions. Each member gives ideas on what they can do and what programs they have initiated for the school to achieve, and our principal listens and supports us.

Respondents	RQ4: Verbatim Responses
RQ4H.	Teams are working together to form plans and programs where they co-teach across the curriculum to different levels of students identified by data; everyone understands what is at stake, and our principal reminds us.
RQ4H.	My principal connects the school's mission, vision and goals to the work in the PLC's by ensuring we are making decisions based on what's best for students. The decisions we make are based on if we are preparing our students to be productive citizens for life not just in our classrooms.
RQ4H.	We receive data and go from there to determine ways we can improve and better ourselves, school, and students, and our principal is an active participant.
RQ4H.	This new relationship forged between administrators and teachers leads to shared and collegial leadership in the school, where all grow professional and learn to view themselves (to use as athletic metaphor) as "all playing on the same team and working toward the same goal: a better school."

Summary of Research Question 4

The principals and PLC teams connect the school's mission, vision, and goals to work of the PLCs by making sure the decisions and strategies used move the PLCs towards attainment of mission, vision, and goals. The main goal is to improve student achievement. The principals make sure that the PLC teams work together to plan. Based on data, learning models meet the individual needs of students. In summary, principals ensure that the PLCs' work is consistent with the school's mission, vision, and goals. Information shared and discussed in the PLCs are pertinent and relative to goals.

Research Question 5: How does your principal foster teacher collaboration during PLCs?

Table 7

Research Question 5 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ5: Verbatim Responses
RQ5E.	Teachers participate in some of the decision-making process. They also give feedback to decisions made. The principal listens to the feedback from the teachers.
RQ5E.	The principal fosters collaboration by scheduling PLCs with teachers who teach the same students and who are able to share ideas and connect lessons across the curriculum.
RQ5E.	Principal encourages teacher collaboration during (and outside) PLCs. Principal encourages us to have honest conversations about our students, what is working, what is not working, and how we as an individual teacher and as a team will address those things that are not working. Conversations are expected to be professional and productive with an outcome that is going to be best for the students.
RQ5E.	The principal fosters teacher collaboration during PLCs by participating and adding knowledge as needed.
RQ5E.	When my principal is facilitating the PLC she ensures that teachers share ideas for best practices with each other, along with pushing us to use historical data and current data across all subject areas to determine decisions in all classrooms.
RQ5M.	Our principal fosters teacher collaboration by; consistently reminding teachers of the school goals/values; keeps mission in forefront of all conversation; allows time for teachers to work together on goals/issues; designates each Tuesday for a specific goal (task Force Tuesday, Data Tuesday, etc.); doesn't micromanage/dictate every strategy but allows teachers to come up with solutions that best fit their team; and listens of staff.
RQ5M.	My principal asks questions and makes comments that encourages collaboration among teachers.
RQ5M.	The learning community is demonstrated by people from multiple constituencies, at all levels, collaboratively and continually working together, along with our principal. Staff conduct conversations about students and teaching and learning, identifying related issues and problems.
RQ5M.	During PLCs, my principal fosters teacher collaboration by encouraging teachers to speak openly and engage in in-depth discussions.
RQ5M.	My principal fosters teacher collaboration by giving every teacher the opportunity to share, asks questions and make decisions.

Respondents	RQ5: Verbatim Responses
RQ5H.	My principal takes the time to set the tone in PLCs for teacher collaboration by carefully placing appropriate topics for discussion on the agenda that will force teachers to work together to address teaching and learning.
RQ5H.	Teachers in our school collaborate in PLCs because our principal actively participates with teachers. Our principal makes the atmosphere calm and welcoming, yet professional so that we remain on task.
RQ5H.	Although, there are times when our principal may be called away from our PLCs meetings, most of the time by other teachers to assist with an issue, our principal ensures that the time designated for PLCs for teachers is uninterrupted by events or happenings within the school. Therefore, time is allotted for PLCs and is kept sacred.
RQ5H.	Our principal asks probing questions that will get you to thinking and collaborating with teachers during PLCs. She is always challenging us to go beyond the norms and 'think outside the box.'
RQ5H.	The principal fosters teacher collaboration during PLCs by placing teachers in small groups to share ideas and then permitting small teams to share out.

Summary of Research Question 5

Principals do not dominate PLCs, but they do play a critical role. They serve as listeners on the elementary level but leave teachers with the flexibility to solve their own problems. In middle school, principals serve as guides, as they keep the goals in view while allowing teachers to come up with their own solutions. In high school, principals set the agenda; but again, they get out of the way and allow teachers to work collaboratively. They also encourage creativity. Principals foster collaboration by scheduling PLCs with teachers who teach the same students and who are able to share ideas and connect lessons across the curriculum. Other principals facilitate the PLCs to ensure that teachers share ideas for best practices along with ensuring the use of historical data and current data across all subject areas. Some principals foster teacher

collaboration by consistently reminding teachers of the school goals/values; keeping the mission at the forefront of all conversations; allowing time for teachers to work together on goals/issues; and designating various days for specific goals, not micromanaging and dictating every strategy, but allowing teachers to come up with solutions that best fit their teams and students.

Research Question 6. How does your principal create the conditions and/or environment for successful teacher collaboration (before, during, after PLCs)?

Table 8

Research Question 6 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ6: Verbatim Responses

RQ6E.   She creates an atmosphere to enhance collaboration among workers that allow staff members to work together effectively and productively.

RQ6E.   Teachers continue collaboration efforts by attending department meetings. All of the teachers who teach the same subject area meet to discuss standards and learning objectives for their students.

RQ6E.   **Before:** Any information that is needed for PLCs is sent out either by our principal or the curriculum facilitator so that teachers can review it and be prepared to discuss it. **During:** Our principal facilitates conversations by allowing teachers to share their thoughts and ideas as well as ask their own questions. She leads discussions with teachers in order to make sure we have a clear understanding of the information at hand.
After: Information from previous PLCs is later revisited as a way to compare the past and present. This is so that teachers can see whether or not the plans they discussed and put into place are working.

RQ6E.   The context for successful teacher collaboration during PLCs is having a place to host PLCs with technology, supplies and materials, and researched-based information.

RQ6E.   Our principal pushes and expects us to make our own decisions in our classroom, she presents the instruments, data and best practices to use and expects us to use what works best for our classroom. She also has a personality that allows us to feel as though we can be ourselves during our PLCs.

RQ6M.   PLCs are set up where teams meet together. Teachers who work with same students work together for the betterment of that team and ultimately the school. Before PLCs begin, a schedule is given at beginning of year that includes meeting dates, place, and topics of concern.

RQ6M.   My principal creates the conditions and environment for successful teacher collaboration before PLC's by providing the teachers with an agenda, date and time of every PLC. During PLC the principal redirects the teachers to the agenda if we began to get off the topic. After PLC's the principal corresponds with teachers throughout the school day to see how adjustments were made or how students are adapting. The principal also observes teachers' classrooms to make sure the information that teachers receive in PLC's are being utilized.

(continued)

Respondents	RQ6: Verbatim Responses
RQ6M.	Administrators, along with teachers, must be learners too, "questioning, investigating, seeking solutions" for school improvement. The traditional pattern that "teachers teach, students learn, and administrators manage is completely altered…There is no longer a hierarchy of who knows more that someone else, but rather the need of everyone to contribute." Therefore, our principal ensures that there are no big I's or little You's.
RQ6M.	The principal provides an atmosphere of trust and reliability by always being available to offer assistance in all areas concerned with student achievement. The teachers are trusted and allowed to be creative and encouraged to collaborate in a comfortable environment that is dictated by the needs and desires of the teachers.
RQ6M.	Our principal creates an environment that is positive in reference to teacher collaboration by adhering to norms and standards created, by providing teachers with all needed resources, and by having a sense of humor about issues that may not be so positive. Our principal does these things before, during and after PLCs weekly.
RQ6H.	Collaboration is very important. Our principal makes sure there is follow through for what is decided upon during the PLC. She is always visiting classrooms to make sure that successful teaching and student engagement is happening.
RQ6H.	Before a PLC, we receive an agenda that will help us stay in tune with her expectations weekly. During PLC, our principal will be at our initial meeting to explain the requirements and expectations during and after the PLC. Our curriculum facilitator is assigned to manage the PLC process. After the PLC, all PLCs require an agenda and minutes to be sent to the principal.
RQ6H.	We are allotted the time to collaborate weekly in PLCs and our individual weekly team meetings. There are established norms and procedures listed; however, they are not revisited as much as they should be. Also, we are a data driven school, but many faculty/staff still do not understand how they can contribute or how they impact or even hinder the group. We are at the cusp of sustaining, but still require a little more work and consistent follow through.
RQ6H.	My principal creates the conditions and an environment for successful teacher collaboration by ensuring that we feel a sense of value and that our input is meaningful. Our principal listens and shares, and does not make anyone feel less important.
RQ6H.	Our principal takes the time to inform us of expectations and holds us accountable. Our principal models how to effectively collaborate by participating in PLC's with us. Our principal also ensures that time during PLC's is valued and not wasted. We truly keep the focus on students, teaching and learning, and student achievement.

Summary of Research Question 6

Principals lean more toward enforcing accountability. Participants talked about how principals spend time in classrooms ensuring that PLC strategies are carried out. One high school participant spoke to the dangers of the principal not being there to enforce the follow through. In that case, it is implied that the PLCs are dysfunctional. In elementary schools, principals help teachers connect lessons across the curriculum as they collaborate to set goals. Middle school principals are focused on staying on task by observing classes to ensure that group strategies are executed. Middle school principals also create the conditions for PLCs by establishing common planning periods. High school principals, at the beginning of the year, provide a schedule with dates, place, and topics of concerns. These principals expect teachers to make decisions about their classrooms by presenting data and best practices. The expectations are for teachers to use what works best for students. Some principals provided teachers with the PLC agendas ahead of time for their review in order for them to be prepared to discuss at the meetings. During meetings, principals facilitate conversations by allowing teachers to share their thoughts and ideas as well as by asking teachers specific questions about information submitted to teachers. Some principals lead discussions with teachers in order to make sure they have a clear understanding of the information at hand. After the meetings, some principals provide information from previous PLC meetings as a way to compare the past and present. In summary, the principals in District M create an atmosphere that enhances collaboration using various strategies and systems that allow teachers and staff to work together effectively and productively for students.

Research Question 7. What systems (time for PLCs training, resources,

support, etc.) are in place to foster successful teacher collaboration? Who is

responsible for putting the systems in place?

Table 9

Research Question 7 Verbatim Responses

Respondents	RQ7: Verbatim Responses
RQ7E.	The structure of our school is aligned so that every team meets. Teams meet every Tuesday. Training and support is done through staff developments and supported by the principal and our curriculum coordinator.
RQ7E.	PLC meetings and training sessions are scheduled on a weekly basis. There is a resource room in the school in which books and other resources are made available for teachers to use in their classroom. In addition, resources are electronically gathered and stored using Google drive. Our curriculum facilitator is responsible for putting the systems in place.
RQ7E.	PLCs are held during the teacher's planning time 1-2 times per week. The Curriculum Facilitator generally collects resources that teachers can use to either direct their instructional practices or use with students as instructional activities.
RQ7E.	The systems in place to foster successful teacher collaboration include having the time to meet as a team. Other systems include having the technology to accommodate the needs of the adult learner and visual learner.
RQ7E.	Our PLCs are always during the first portion of our planning periods, which allow us to be able to still have time for lesson planning and anything else that needs to get done. Also our PLC's are normally done with our team which allows for us to collaborate together on best practices with our particular students.
RQ7M.	Systems in place are; common time for teams, and resources such as laptops and data information are provided during PLC. Our curriculum facilitator and principal are responsible for systems.
RQ7M.	Our curriculum facilitator provides teachers with training resources and support. There is also a teacher library located within our school with books on pedagogy techniques and other trainings that are accessible at any time for teachers. There is also monthly staff meetings organized for teachers to discuss important issues. The principal organizes meeting topics while the Curriculum facilitator organizes PLCs based on data. Data is gathered from student academic progress and also behaviors which determine the topics of PLCs and staff meetings.

Respondents	RQ7: Verbatim Responses
RQ7M.	The systems in place to foster teacher collaboration among teachers is that they meet during their planning on Tuesdays. The first Tuesday of the month are dedicated to data and student concerns, the second Tuesday of the month is dedicated to technology, the third Tuesday is for think tanking (coming up with different solutions to common problems), and the fourth Tuesday is revisiting student concerns. Our Curriculum Facilitator normally assists our principal, but overall the principal puts it all together.
RQ7M.	PLC's are scheduled for every Tuesday and Thursday, with Tuesdays focused on technology and data and Thursday on collaborative planning and pacing.
RQ7M.	Our Curriculum Specialist is responsible for putting systems in place. She decides on what time the PLC is and where we meet each time. She comes up with the training and support for teachers in the building.
RQ7H.	Our principal is responsible for putting systems in place and our Curriculum Facilitator is responsible for ensuring that the systems put in place by the principal are adhered to during all PLCs . Our principal participates in PLC's, but she is an active participant and does not over power the PLC which creates successful teacher collaboration.
RQ7H.	Administration, the Curriculum Facilitator, and staff are all responsible for putting systems in place. We use test data, benchmarks, and walk-through observations to help create systems that staff believe assist with successful collaboration.
RQ7H.	Teacher-led professional developments allows teachers to improve others' work and their own, expanding their impact on students and teachers, without leaving the classroom by sharing strategies, best practices and lessons on how to improve their classroom practices to help students. This is a system that is in place and creates a culture within our school for collaboration and it also creates success. This system is created and supported by our principal.
RQ7H.	The principal is responsible for putting systems in place for teachers and staff. The principal makes an effort to involve all stakeholders and values the opinions or input of others. Our principal ensures that all money spent on resources and materials are used to support students and teachers in the classroom.

Summary of Research Question 7

A specific structure is set up for PLCs. There are set times, set places, and set topics of discussion. Also, principals make additional support staff available to assist members of the PLC.

PLC meetings and training sessions are scheduled on a weekly basis in order to create an environment for successful teacher collaboration. There are resource rooms in the schools in which books and other resources are made available for teachers to use in their classrooms. In addition, resources are electronically gathered and stored using Google drive and other electronic devices. Some PLC meetings are scheduled during the first portion of the planning periods which allows teachers to be able to have time for planning. Some principals have a common time for PLC teams and teachers to review PLC models at their schools. Some principals foster collaboration by scheduling PLC meeting time as part of the master schedule. Other systems available include having the technology to accommodate the needs of the adult learners. The principals and/or curriculum facilitators are the individuals responsible for ensuring the systems are in place for successful PLCs.

Research Question 8. What happens to the culture of collaboration among teachers when your principal is present and participates in PLCs?

Table 10

Research Question 8 Verbatim Responses

Respondents	RQ8**:** Verbatim Responses
RQ8E.	Team members are able to ask questions and discuss relevant events.
RQ8E.	There is no change in the culture of collaboration among teachers because the principal sets the expectation of PLCs and regardless of her presence teachers do what they know is expected. Our principal's presence does not affect or influence team culture or collaboration because of her being visible throughout the day in and out of classrooms. When our principal participates, she participates and interacts with teachers from a teacher perspective by sharing ideas and acknowledging ideas of others. Our principal challenges the status quo by asking us to think outside of the box. She encourages teachers to find and utilize strategies that will work for the students they teach and not what is commonly accepted.
RQ8E.	I don't think the presence of our principal greatly impacts how we act or participate in those meetings. I believe that our principal has created a very trusting and supportive atmosphere within our school so teachers are comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions with one another and with the administrative team.
RQ8E.	"When the cat's away, the mouse will play." That's the best way to describe the sense of urgency from teachers when the principal is absent from PLCs. Because the principal is the instructional leader, evaluator, and the person who determines whether a teacher will get their job the next school year, her presence represents power, authority, and it creates a sense of urgency for teachers.
RQ8E.	The presence of the principal pushes teachers to be on time, along with seeing more teachers participate and come prepared for the PLC. This definitely strengthens the culture of the team. Yes, as previously stated, team culture and collaboration increases in that teachers are more attentive and more likely to participate when their direct supervisor is there. I feel as though our teachers do speak their mind, I do think that at times teachers do not speak as freely as they would want to for not wanting to seem like they are complaining.
RQ8H.	When our principal is not present in the PLCs then the topics tend to stray off topic. Therefore, yes the presence of the principal influences the culture or team collaboration because when our principal is present, the team remains on topic and things really run smoother.
RQ8H.	Our principal has created a strong foundation that it doesn't really change anything when our principal isn't present. All teachers and staff know and understand what our principal expects whether our principal is in our PLCs or not.

Respondents	RQ8: Verbatim Responses
RQ8H.	Yes, the presence of the principal does make a difference because our team will remain more focused and on point when our principal is present. When our principal participates in PLCs it makes the team feel good, and that our principal understands and values team work and collaboration. It makes us work harder to prove to our principal we have her back.
RQ8H.	Many individuals hold back and are not honest when our principal is present in PLCs, and they wait until the principal leaves to form groups outside of the PLC to really voice their concerns or disdain. Therefore, yes, when our principal participates it does change the culture of the PLC, but our principal needs to be present because some team members take advantage of PLC time.
RQ8H.	When our principal is present the team stays on task, but many times hold back or are afraid to ask questions in general or for clarification because they do not want to feel or be perceived by team mates that they are not as knowledgeable or unknowing of information; especially if our principal already provided the information. The culture of collaboration changes in a positive way when our principal is present because the team is more focused and stays on task rather than the PLC turning into a gripe session. PLCs have been successful and are successful at our school because team members work together as a community.

Summary of Research Question 8

There is a definite impact when the principal is active in the PLC. Almost all of the respondents agreed on that. However, that impact appears to be a two-edged sword. The principal represents an authority figure and therefore some teachers may be hindered when it comes to speaking freely. However, elementary teachers pointed out that the principal encourages them and answers questions. The principal also creates an atmosphere of trust and collaboration. High school respondents said the presence of the principal helps them stay on task and sets a foundation conducive to them working together. They also said the principal's presence shows that the work they are doing is valued.

Some teachers felt like there was no change in the culture of collaboration among teachers because the principal sets the expectation of PLCs; and regardless of the

principal's presence, most teachers did what was expected of them as teachers. Other teachers felt that the presence of the principal forced teachers to be on time along with seeing more teachers participating and more teachers coming prepared for the PLC meetings. They said collaboration among teachers was more productive when principals were present. The meetings were more formal and teams followed the agenda. Principal presence in PLCs had a positive effect on the meetings because teachers were able to review data with the principals and provide immediate feedback to questions and concerns. The PLCs were more informative when the principal was present and there was less time off task.

For the second part of the question, "Does the presence of the principal influence team culture of team collaboration during the PLCs," both "yes" and "no" responses were provided by teachers. Eleven of 15 teachers stated that the principal had no influence on team culture and collaboration during the PLCs, and four of 15 teachers stated "yes" to the question. How? The principal's presence does not affect or influence team culture or collaboration because of visibility throughout the day in and out of classrooms. Yes, team culture and collaboration increased when the principals were present. Teachers were more attentive and more likely to participate when the principals were present. The presence of the principal affected team collaboration. Teachers felt like they spoked their minds; however, teachers did not speak as freely because the teachers did want to seem like they were complaining about the process. For the third part of the question, "Does the culture of collaboration change when the principal participated in PLCs," both yes and no responses were provided by teachers. Eight of 15 teachers stated that the culture of collaboration did change when the principal participated in PLCs, and seven of 15 teachers stated that it did not change. How? There was no sense of urgency from

teachers when the principal was absent from PLCs, because the principal is the instructional leader, evaluator, and the person who determines whether teachers will retain their position for the next school year. The principal's presence represents power and authority and it creates a sense of urgency for teachers. Some teachers believed there was still open communication/honesty among teachers and curriculum facilitators. Teachers felt like the collaboration changed when the principal participated in PLC meetings. Some teachers indicated that teachers did not ask questions or voice opinions in the same manner when principals were present in the meetings.

Research Question 9. How does your principal encourage teachers to challenge the status quo?

Table 11

Research Question 9 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ9: Verbatim Responses
RQ9E.	Teams are consistently searching for new ways of teaching to motivate and ensure student learning takes place. Team members often reflect together on their ideas and values.
RQ9E.	The principal encourages teachers to challenge the status quo by providing professional development within the school, and by encouraging the faculty and staff to attend state and national educational seminars that provide the latest in innovative educational strategies. The principal also creates an atmosphere that empowers the parent and makes them, as well as, the community feel as if the school belongs to them.
RQ9E.	Our principal fosters open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs by providing teachers with the topics to be discussed prior to the meeting. This gives teachers time to think and read the information that is going to be discussed. Teachers having this information before time helps the discussions to be open and meaningful.
RQ9E.	Our principal holds every teacher to a high standard. She expects us to be innovative professionals that always strive to do what is best for children. With the supportive atmosphere in the school and the expectations of high standards, I believe that most teachers rise to the occasion on their own accord. Expectations are laid out to us as a staff and for the most part, we do our best to meet and exceed those expectations.
RQ9E.	The principal encourages teachers to challenge the status quo by expecting excellence from both teachers and students. The principal encourages teachers to challenge the status quo by setting and exceeding data-driven goals.
RQ9M.	Our principal is always telling us to use whatever strategies we feel as though are best for students. She has no problem being the only school in our district doing something different as long as the strategy is proven and is best for kids. She pushes us to challenge the status quo through examples, some of the strategies that she uses in our school are doing that exact thing. For instance, not having bells and students not talking in the hallway. These examples are ways that she is challenging the status quo, which empowers us to feel as though we can do the same.
RQ9M.	Our principal encourages us to challenge the status quo by voicing our ideas and opinions, but having data to support our ideas and opinions.
RQ9M.	By not making excuses and reminding us to work with what we have to make it happen. The principal is always encouraging and positive which makes a major difference. When you see that your head/lead is empowered to make a difference/change it trickles down and makes you want to do the same as well. The principal always reminds us we cannot live in the past of how things used to be, but rather focus on the here and now, and how we can pull together for the betterment of our students.

Respondents	RQ9: Verbatim Responses
RQ9M.	My principal presents the data of our student's progress, and as a team we discuss ways to adapt and adjust our teaching strategies to reach all students.
RQ9M.	I think that in this day and age, educators have to think outside of the box to achieve success with today's students. If everyone thought the same thing, how would the growth come about? Our principal empowers teachers to do the necessary things to get our students over the hump. No one is afraid to speak up or to ask those crucial questions of her that stimulates success.
RQ9H.	She sets the bar high and demands greatness. She encourages team collaboration among staff members and friendly competition.
RQ9H.	We are encouraged to do what is right for children. This is how our principal encourages us to challenge the status quo.
RQ9H.	Our principal encourages us to be confident in our ability, to make decisions that are data driven, and to be able to explain any deviation from pacing or other guides that we feel are in the students' best interests.
RQ9H.	Our principal always reminds us that we are here for students and its not about us. We move forward at all costs and we make every effort to make our culture a place that values children, regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Summary of Research Question 9

Participants said principals encourage them to challenge the status quo in a variety of ways. The methods included but were not limited to sending teachers to state and national seminars, showing teachers real-life examples of innovations, or seeking outside assistance.

Elementary teachers said principals help them reflect on ideas and values as a way of seeing what true innovation might be. They also said they attended seminars and involved parents and the community. They said principals clearly communicate goals.

Middle school teachers said principals give them the freedom to choose their own

best course of action, but the principal also maintains a positive atmosphere. The participants also said the principal keeps the focus on what is happening now in the school instead of falling back on what was done in the past.

High school teachers said principals allow professional competition and encourage the teachers to trust their instincts in making data-based decisions. This group was encouraged to seek outside assistance in the form of grants, support, or volunteers.

Some principals encourage teachers to challenge the status quo by providing professional development within the school and by encouraging teachers and staff to attend state and national educational seminars that provide the latest in innovative educational strategies. Other principals foster open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs by providing teachers with the topics to be discussed prior to the meeting, giving teachers time to read and think about information to be discussed during the meeting. Teachers felt like having this information ahead of time helped the discussions to be open and meaningful. Some principals encouraged teachers to challenge the status quo by voicing ideas and opinions but also required them to have data to support their ideas and opinions. Principals also encourage teachers to challenge the status quo by expecting excellence from both teachers and students and by encouraging teachers to set and exceed data-driven goals.

Research Question 10. How does your principal foster open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs?

Table 12

Research Question 10 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ10: Verbatim Responses
RQ10E.	She creates an atmosphere that allows teachers to speak freely on topics or issues of concern. She invites teams to provide constructive feedback on controversial issues.
RQ10E.	The principal fosters open communication and meaningful discussion during PLCs by leading the conversation and addressing teacher concerns. The principal follows the agenda and address all questions.
RQ10E.	Some teachers freely voice their opinions because the principal tries to encourage an atmosphere of freedom. However some other teachers are intimidated by her presence and do not freely voice their opinion. I do not know why some of the teachers are intimidated.
RQ10E.	There is a very supportive feeling among the staff, of all levels, at our school. The feeling does not disappear when we enter PLCs. We are able to have professional discussions with other teachers and with administration. I believe that we are able to freely express our ideas and concerns during these meetings without feeling intimidated.
RQ10E.	The principal fosters open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs by making the environment safe to be open, meaningful, and professional. The principal fosters open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs by actively listening and being more than physically present. Discussions are kept within professional parameters about best practices and strategies to improve teaching and learning.
RQ10M.	She pushes us all to speak freely, and provides guided questions to help point us in the right direction which allows for everyone to feel as though they can give their two cents.
RQ10M.	She tells us to "say what's on your mind"; she asks questions to clarify or probe/find a solution. For example, "How will that help the students?" "What would that look like in the classroom?"
RQ10M.	By being welcoming and having a pleasant disposition. Even when data does not look good or teachers and teams are regressing, the principal does not become rude or speaks down to us. Maintaining professionalism is expressed where the weaknesses lie and what we plan to do as individuals and/or a group to make improvements. The principal also lets us speak first and those who want to share thoughts, ideas and concerns are free to do so. Mainly our opinions and thoughts are taken into consideration and the communication and discussion is never one-sided (the principal's side). Like with students, you feel better and connected when you feel you are a part of the process, and we are definitely a part of the process.

(continued)

Respondents	RQ10: Verbatim Responses
RQ10M.	We establish norms, which include respecting others. While someone is talking, there are no interruptions. We all share our thoughts and opinions on topics concerning students and their education at our school.
RQ10M.	The floor is open at all times during PLCs and as I stated on the last question, no one is afraid to voice their opinions or concerns or even to suggest other alternatives that weren't presented that day.
RQ10H.	Our principal is open to ideas and asks for our input on school decisions that affect our classrooms. She also encourages solutions to any problems that may arise.
RQ10H.	Our principal goes around the table and asks questions that relate to the issue being discussed. Our principal makes sure everybody is contributing to the conversation. Lastly, our principal ensures that everybody listens when someone else is sharing a thought or suggestion.
RQ10H.	The principal sends out emails in between PLC meetings to ensure that everybody is on the same page and carrying out the school's mission and vision, but also adhering to PLC expectations. The principal also makes sure that the environment is safe and open by listening and sometimes not saying anything, just listening. This means a lot.
RQ10H.	The principal models what she needs to model in regards to fostering open communication by permitting staff to communicate openly and not dismissing the thoughts of others.
RQ10H.	Our principal works very diligently to ensure that all staff members, first of all, understands that their opinion is valued their opinion and feels free to communicate their opinion amongst the team during PLC. Our principal always encourages participation and our principal allows for teachers who are strong in specific areas to present or share during a PLC, if the topic relates or could be beneficial to others.

Summary of Research Question 10

Fostering open communication and meaningful discussion may be a challenging

task for principals. As stated earlier, principals are authority figures and direct

supervisors and inherent in that role may be the potential for intimidation. However,

principals can overcome this as the participants showed. Elementary school participants

said principals create an open atmosphere for voicing concerns. That atmosphere is set

schoolwide, not just for PLC members. The majority of participants cited their

principal's positive attitude amid open discussions. In some cases, the principals led the discussion and initiated discussions about concerns while maintaining a professional tenor. A key element in open, meaningful communication is that one must be a good listener. Participants said the principals were good listeners. Middle school participants said principals skillfully asked questions and sought honest input. The principal also diligently kept teachers involved during meetings and in follow-up work. High school teachers said principals often showed PLC members it was okay to be open and honest. The principal also worked to show PLC members that their opinions were valued.

Some teachers indicated that their principal fosters open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs by having the curriculum facilitators to share ideas and strategies that work. Other principals foster open communication and meaningful discussion during PLCs by leading the conversation, addressing teacher concerns, and following the agenda. Principals allow teachers to freely voice their opinions without fear of retaliation of any kind. Teachers stated that principals foster open communication by having open sessions so there is enough time for everyone to speak regarding matters of concern. It appears that none of the teachers in the open sessions were afraid to voice their opinions or concerns or even to suggest other alternatives. Teachers believed that the principals had a pleasant disposition even when data were not positive. This type of disposition fostered open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs. Principals also allow teachers to speak first and those who wanted to share thoughts, ideas, and concerns were free to do so. Teachers' opinions and thoughts were taken into consideration and discussed by principals and teachers. The discussions were never one-sided (the principal's side).

Research Question 11: How do the teachers freely voice their opinions when

the principal participate in PLC?

Table 13

Research Question 11 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ11: Verbatim Responses
RQ11E.	Teachers are a part of the decision-making process that involves student learning; therefore, our teachers know they are free to voice opinions. Our principal encourages it.
RQ11E.	The teachers freely voice their opinions when the principal participates in PLCs by respecting each other while talking. After a person voice their opinion, others will state their opinion respectfully. The principal then adds to the conversation by sating facts backed by current data.
RQ11E.	Our principal fosters shared leadership during PLCs by allowing teachers and the curriculum facilitators to share their ideas and strategies that work in their classroom. During classroom visits, she picks up ideas from teachers and ask them to share it with others at PLC meetings.
RQ11E.	I feel as though our teachers do speak their mind. I also do feel like our –principal sets the tone by encouraging us to speak our mind.
RQ11M.	I believe teachers do voice their opinion. If teachers don't voice their opinions during PLC, it's because they know they'll be expected to help with a solution and a solution may not be readily available so nothing is said.
RQ11M.	Our teachers voice their opinions by verbally expressing themselves, responding to a question that may have been posed, participating in a discussion around a specific topic, or just sharing their thoughts, but in a professional manner.
RQ11M.	Teachers are respectful of each other as stated in the norms set by the teachers in the first PLC. Teachers can freely state their opinions without fear of retaliation of any kind. The principal addresses all concerns in a respectful manner and offers many alternatives for any problems.
RQ11M.	If you don't ask, then you won't know. When is a better time to voice concerns except the instructional leader of the school is available? Our principal encourages it.
RQ11M.	We are always encouraged to speak frankly and respectfully. Conversations are always kept on target, and our principal will redirect the conversation to ensure the solution is reached for the original objective.
RQ11M.	The environment set by our principal is very open and straightforward. You are expected to speak openly and you are expected to show and give the same respect to others.

Respondents	RQ11: Verbatim Responses
RQ11H.	Our principal believes that everyone is a part of our team and this shows when we are in PLCs because you are greeted and welcomed to the meeting, even though you have already been greeted upon arrival to school. Our principal always begins our PLCs by thanking everyone and reminding everyone of our expectations as professionals. In other words, we know that we are expected to effectively communicate and value others as they are communicating.
RQ11H.	Teachers at our school freely voice their opinions in PLCs when our principal is present by simply sharing what they feel. Our principal has ensured that the PLC is professional, yet relaxed enough that when you enter she has soft classical music playing and some type of snack. This truly sets the tone and makes you feel welcome and that you are valued.

Summary of Research Question 11

The participants said in order for them to freely communicate when the principal is present, the atmosphere must be set. That atmosphere is set largely by the principal who makes PLC members feel comfortable and appreciated. Most of the communication was verbal.

Elementary teachers said principals are part of the decision making and they are free to voice their opinions. The principal encourages and respects the teachers' opinions. Leadership is fostered by allowing teachers to share ideas and strategies that work.

Middle school participants said they responded to questions that had been asked and that gave them the opportunity to voice their thoughts. Middle school teachers are encouraged to freely state their opinion without fear of retaliation. They are also encouraged to speak frankly and respectfully, and the principal addresses concerns in a respectful manner.

High school teachers said the principal offered niceties during the meeting to make them feel appreciated. They feel comfortable answering questions, sharing their

ideas, and even sharing personal experiences. High school principals believe that everyone is a part of the team and expected to communicate and value others as they are communicating.

According to some teachers, they could freely state their opinions without fear of retaliation. Other teachers believed that many individuals hold back and are not honest but wait until the principal leaves or forms groups outside of the PLC to really voice concerns or disdain.

Research Questions 12: How does your principal foster shared leadership during PLCs?

Table 14

Research Question 12 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ12**:** Verbatim Responses
RQ12E.	She empowers teachers to become leaders by actively stepping into leadership roles that impact student learning.
RQ12E.	The principal fosters shared leadership during PLC by appointing a team lead person. In the absence of the principal the team lead person facilities the meeting.
RQ12E.	The PLC team is empowered and does makes decisions that impact student quality regardless of principal participation. There are some teachers who wait on our principal to guide them, but for the most part others work and do what needs to be with little supervision.
RQ12E.	If we need to have conversations about specific content areas, our principal will ask that teacher to share with the group. She will ask the teacher to share what they are doing that is working, what isn't working, what they plan on doing to make changes, how they will measure those changes, etc. We are expected to take ownership of our areas and speak/share openly about them.
RQ12E.	When the principal is present during PLCs, she does evoke active participation from all teachers by asking open-ended questions, asking for suggestions, and brainstorming ideas that's for the betterment of the school. Collaboration is encouraged. She doesn't mind asking for assistance from the curriculum facilitator if assistance is needed.
RQ12M.	She does not simply assign one person to be "in charge" of the whole session, even if she has chosen someone to facilitate the PLC, there still may be a guest speaker, or she will chose a teacher who is confident in the topic, to help with the facilitation.
RQ12M.	Shared leadership: I believe teachers feel empowered to make decisions and act. Allows teachers to implement their ideas that benefit class/school.
RQ12M.	Allows those teacher leaders to lead/contribute to PLCs in their area of strengths based on workshops, meetings, and classes they may have attended to share their knowledge with colleagues. The principal truly lets the teacher lead and does not micromanage or take over the PLC and only contributes to the discussion and conversation to add or to answer a probing question.
RQ12M.	By encouraging all participants to share and by valuing all input. Occasionally, she will ask a member of the community to share a particular strategy she has observed that could benefit others.

RQ12M.	Our department chairperson is the first person that teachers share their concerns with and she shares it with the principal. Major issues are addressed with the principal in PLC and placed on the weekly agenda.

Respondents	RQ12: Verbatim Responses
RQ12H.	The principal has created an environment that allows us to speak freely and openly. The environment is comfortable and welcoming for new staff members.
RQ12H.	During PLCS our teams meet (they consist of the four core disciplines in schools) and we always have the team leader present. He or she can speak on behalf of the team as a whole or individual teacher speaks when the need arises. The principal does not have a problem with the others sharing or advising as long as it is done in a respectful manner.
RQ12H.	Our principal fosters shared leadership during PLCs by insisting that teachers lead in their area of strength, and feel comfortable leading. Our principal will even help you put a presentation together to present information.
RQ12H.	Shared leadership is encouraged by our principal because she will create the agenda and have teachers and staff take part on portions of the agenda; such as the welcome and sharing an idea or thought.
RQ12H.	Our principal fosters shared leadership during PLCs by asking teachers to send an email of any items that need to be discussed during PLCs, and allow them to discuss the items on the agenda during PLCs.

Summary of Research Question 12

Principals foster shared leadership by allowing PLC members to assume and carry out roles of leadership. Often that means the principal is in the background while PLC members are in the spotlight. Elementary teachers feel that they are empowered to make informed decisions and to share strategies that work or do not work. Overall, the elementary teachers feel that they needed little supervision and are expected to take ownership of their work and speak about it openly. Collaboration is encouraged as is making key decisions and sharing with the group strategies that work or do not work.

Middle school teachers are allowed to implement ideas and make decisions as

leadership is often shared. High school participants stated that the principals foster shared leadership by insisting that teachers lead in their area of strength. The environment is comfortable and welcoming and allows teachers to speak freely in a respectful manner.

Based on some teachers' responses, the principal fostered shared leadership during PLCs by appointing a team lead person. In some cases, the principals allowed team lead individuals to facilitate the meeting and allowed teachers to implement their ideas that benefit class and school. At some schools, the PLC team leader presents the information at all meetings. They speak on behalf of the team as a whole or an individual teacher speaks when the need arises. The principal does not have a problem with other individuals sharing or advising, as long as it is done in a respectful manner.

Research Question 13. How do you perceive that PLC teams feel empowered to make decisions that directly impact the quality of student learning when the principal participates in PLCs, or do the teachers wait on the principal to guide them and tell them what to do? Explain you answer.

Table 15

Research Question 13 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ13: Verbatim Responses
RQ13E.	Teachers use student data to guide them through the PLC. The main focus is student achievement and improve on the quality of learning.
RQ13E.	The PLC team feels empowered to make decisions that directly impact the quality of student learning when the principal is or is not present. Teachers work together to come up with best practices to improve student learning. The decisions are based on data collected. When the PLC team works together the quality of student learning improves because all of the content teachers are teaching the same concepts.
RQ13E.	When our principal participates in PLCs, she does a very good job of laying out information so that conversations can flow pretty freely. Every once and awhile, teachers might need a little push if we get stuck but I don't think we need a push to get started. We trust one another and feel that we can express ourselves pretty freely.
RQ13E.	The majority of the teachers do take the initiative to do what's best for their students. The teachers who take the initiative to do what's best for teaching and learning are usually teachers who tests scores reflect their ability to make sound decisions.
RQ13E.	Teachers who are uncomfortable with a new practice or have no ideas of what to do will wait until the principal tells them what to do - especially with technology strategies. Teachers who are more innovative and flexible will make decisions and act if they make decisions based on data. Teachers know the principal will support them if data is valid and the decisions will help students.
RQ13M.	I do feel as though when the principal participates, the teachers look to him or her for guidance on what to do or which direction to take. Depending on the topic, and teachers comfort level with the topic, some teachers will feel more empowered to take control, but if it is something, they may not have a lot of experience doing, they will not.
RQ13M.	They depend on the principal to guide them and tell them what they should do and then the teachers usually create and discuss implementations, strategies, next steps, etc.
RQ13M.	When the principal is not present for PLCs the curriculum facilitator takes on the leadership role by providing an outline and data. Teachers are active participants in conversation and show interest in new techniques that foster student's learning. With or without the principal, PLCs are productive.
RQ13M.	As stated earlier, the principal empowers all to be thinkers and not mere followers. There is an abundance of knowledge in the room during PLCs and you have to acknowledge that "you" aren't always the smartest in the room. In essence, PLCs are about discovering ways to help educators help students to obtain their desired academic goals.

Respondents	RQ13: Verbatim Responses
RQ13M.	I feel that it doesn't matter if our principal is present at the PLC. We still discuss important matters and we solve problems that are in the building. We love when our principal is present so we can pick her brain and have great conversations.
RQ13H.	The teachers are empowered to make decisions for their classrooms. We are given freedom, as well as, the responsibility to engage students as we feel best.
RQ13H.	Our principal will not impose on our decisions, given that they are made using data and student interest at heart. She is respectful of our professional decisions, as well as, supportive of our needs.
RQ13H.	I do not feel our teachers wait on our principal, but they appreciate our principal being present because our principal really shares ideas, and teachers feel comfortable to share out what is working in their classrooms and what is not working.
RQ13H.	I think our PLC team feels very comfortable in making decisions that directly impact the quality of student learning when the principal is present because she expects us to and she expects that we make informed decisions using data and observations. We feel comfortable because that is what our principal has created as an environment and commends us when we have open dialogue.
RQ13H.	Our principal will participate in PLCs by listening and allowing the PLC team to have robust discussion around decisions that impact students. Our principal has a sense of humor and challenges all teachers to think outside the box and work beyond our school walls.

Summary of Research Question 13

Based on the respondents' answers, when a principal is present, PLC members instinctively first look to that principal for leadership. That, however, does not render the group incapable of progression. If the principal is not there, others assume leadership roles.

The PLC team feels empowered to make decisions that directly impact the quality of student learning when the principal is or is not present. Teachers work together to come up with best practices to improve student learning. The decisions are based on data

collected. When the PLC teams work together, the quality of student learning improves

because all of the content teachers are teaching is the same concept. At some schools,

when the principal is not present for PLCs, the curriculum facilitator takes on the

leadership role and provides an outline and data. Teachers are active participants in

conversation and show interest in new techniques that foster student's learning. With or

without the principal, PLCs are productive. Some teachers indicate that if they are

uncomfortable with a new practice (i.e., PLC) or have no idea of what to do, then they

will wait until the principal tells them what to do, especially with technology strategies.

Teachers who are more innovative and flexible make decisions based on data. These

teachers believe that the principal will support them if their decisions are based on data

that will help students.

Research Question 14. What are identifiable behaviors that foster teacher

collaboration and teacher leadership?

Table 16

Research Question 14 Verbatim Responses by Teachers

Respondents	RQ14: Verbatim Responses
RQ14E.	Trust, openness-sharing in an open dialogue, delegating and sharing in the decision-making, being flexible
RQ14E.	Openness, Shared Decision Making, Working as a Team, Continuous Discussions
RQ14E.	Delegation of tasks, Set time for collaboration, Celebrating successes
RQ14E.	1. Listening 2. Open Communication 3. Valuing input from others
RQ14E.	1. Providing necessary resources for PLCs. 2. Providing time to have PLCs. 3. Following up with teachers and teams as needed. 4. Allowing for open, meaningful, and professional discussions.
RQ14M.	1. Pushing teachers to think on their own. 2. Inspiring teachers to think outside of the norm/what the principal already thinks. 3. Allowing for teachers to see what is going to be discussed before the PLC so they are not put on the spot. 4. Having a different facilitator in the room at times/having another person facilitate the session. 5. Not completely straying away from guiding the teachers on what to talk about/provide some guidance.
RQ14M.	1. Doesn't micromanage/dictate every strategy but allows teachers to come up with solutions that best fit their team; 2. Listens to staff; 3. Keeps mission in forefront of all conversation; 4. Allows time for teachers to work together on goals/issues; 5. Well-planned
RQ14M.	1. Makes/Finds the time for meaningful collaboration to happen during the school day. 2. Establishes a positive culture and climate throughout the school. 3. Has a goal/purpose for collaboration and meetings (teachers are not simply meeting to waste time to justify that they participate in PLCs). 4. Focus the work of collaborative groups by helping them align their work with district and state goals, achievement goals, and provide the resources needed to support the work.

Respondents	RQ14: Verbatim Responses
RQ14M.	1. Informed Agenda 2. Informative E-mails 3. Time set aside for small Groups (we meet with our content area) 4. Questions and answer at the end of each meeting 5. Providing ongoing Professional Development
RQ14M.	Time is given to the Teams to digest and work in small groups; Teams can often pair-share (partner) with another teammate; discussion of work related items are shared (respectfully); Team leaders take the initiative and assist the principal on common goals; "Buy-in" is a must in every PLC, so the teachers thoughts are considered.
RQ14H.	Listening, Participating, Attending Conferences and Providing a forum for sharing out of information learned
RQ14H.	Working Collaboratively, Effectively Communicating, Sharing Openly
RQ14H.	Teachers leading PLCs, Teachers helping create agenda topics for PLCs, Participating in Learning Walks within the school
RQ14H.	Verbal Praise, Continuous Celebrations, Highlighting Strengths of Staff and permitting them to lead in their area of strength
RQ14H.	Effectively Listening, Sharing with Others, Gathering Information and taking the lead to lead others

Summary of Research Question 14

The identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration in District M can be categorized as follows: facilitating open communication, encouraging shared leadership and shared decision making; and providing consistent systems. Whether directly articulated by the interviewee or implied through connotation, the interpretations align to the behaviors listed in Table 17.

Table 17

Behaviors and Supporting Data

Behaviors	Supporting Data Taken from Question 14 Responses
Open Communication	Listen to staff Time for meaningful collaboration Answers questions at the end of PLC Listening Trust Openness Continuous discussion Open and effective communication Sharing openly Does not micromanage
Shared Leadership/Shared Decision Making	Sharing in decision making Delegating tasks Valuing input from others Team leaders take initiative Teachers help create agenda topics Highlighting strengths of staff and permitting them to lead Taking the lead to lead others
Consistent Systems	Time for teachers to work together Time set aside Agenda Providing resources

Interviewees gave the following responses that imply open communication: listen to staff, time for meaningful collaboration, answers questions at the end of PLC, trust, openness, continuous discussion, open and effective communication, sharing openly, does not micromanage.

The second behavior, shared leadership that inspires shared decision making, was crucial in District M. The following responses support the emergence of this category:

sharing in decision making, delegating tasks, valuing input from others, team leaders take

initiative, teachers help create agenda topics, highlighting strengths of staff and

permitting them to lead, and taking the lead to lead.

A third behavior important to fostering teacher collaboration and teacher

leadership in District M is providing consistent systems. The following responses

support the emergence of this category: time for teachers to work together, time set aside,

agenda, and providing support. The data show that many of these responses were

articulated repeatedly.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings and Conclusions

Introduction

One mistake leaders make when attempting to create a collaborative culture within the school is to assign teachers and principals into groups and encourage them to collaborate–with little direction or support . . . the likelihood that people who have worked in isolation their entire career will suddenly discover how to collaborate as a team . . . is extremely remote. (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 47). Simply assigning teachers to teams and asking them to collaborate is like putting students into groups and expecting cooperative learning to occur; notably, teachers on a typical leadership team may represent a wide range of readiness levels when it comes to assuming leadership roles (Wilhelm, 2010). Likewise, the supposition that principals understand how to foster teacher collaboration in PLCs as well as the supposition that teachers comfortably collaborate and share leadership roles in the presence of the principal may be erroneous.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative research was to answer the following central questions. How do principals in District M foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership in PLCs? The following subquestion drove this research. What are the identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership? Data collection occurred through face-to-face interviews. Only teachers whose principals participated in the full implementation of the U.S. Department of Education grant written by the South Carolina University were eligible for participation in this research.

Discussion of Findings and Conclusion

Analyses of the major themes, subthemes, overlapping themes, and the number of times participants mentioned the major or minor themes in their responses were the

procedures used for assigning meaning to the data obtained from the interviews

(Creswell, 2012). Four major themes evolved from the data collected from the

interviews: (a) established teacher collaboration; (b) shared leadership/shared decision

making; (c) established mission, vision, goals, and purpose; and (d) consistent systems.

The four themes reveal how the principals in District M foster teacher collaboration and

teacher leadership in PLCs.

Theme 1: Established Collaboration

Established collaboration is the dominant theme of the interview sessions. Over

70% of the data recorded from the interviewees referenced positive collaboration. With

the exception of questions 9, 10, 11, and 13, teachers at all three grade levels used the

word collaboration repeatedly. In question 1, an elementary teacher stated that their

PLCs are centered on collaborative planning. Again in question 1, an elementary teacher

explained, "PLC expectations are customized according to teams, but the overall goals

are the same, to provide the educator with a collaborative environment designed to

improve student achievement." In question 5, a middle school teacher explained that the

principal fosters teacher collaboration by consistently reminding teachers of the school

goals and values and keeping the mission in the forefront. In question 6, one high school

teacher talked about how the principal makes conditions calm and welcoming. Such

conditions serve to help teachers feel that their thoughts and opinions are valued, whether

or not they are in agreement with the principal. The subtle message the teachers received

from the principals was, "I want you here, and I value your ideas." Also, the benefits of

ongoing, district-wide implementation and PLC training resulting from the U.S.

Department of Education grant were apparent as teachers from all grade levels iterated

the benefits of teacher collaboration. The data obtained from interviewees clearly

indicated that in the early stages of establishing the PLC process, District M principals instilled in the teachers the meaning and value of true collaboration. Also, the data from the interviewees showed that District M principals set the parameters for collaboration on emotional and atmospheric levels. The principals also made sure necessary data and other information were available to teachers. Thus, the principals in District M acutely understand that the sole purpose of building a collaborative culture is to ensure that all activities are focused and centered on student achievement (DuFour et al., 2006). When principals model collaboration and set the tone for collaboration, the foundation is laid for open communication and shared decision making, thus optimizing the reform effort for which students are the recipients.

Open communication. A subtheme of established collaboration is open communication. In question 6, an interviewee stated, "Our principal listens and shares and does not make anyone feel less important." In question 5, an elementary teacher spoke about how the principal encouraged the teachers to have honest discussions about what teaching techniques are and are not working for students. Another interviewee said the principal "has a personality that allows us to feel as though we can be ourselves during our PLCs."

Many other respondents also talked about how the principals encouraged them to speak their minds in a respectful and professional manner. The value of encouragement from the principal was a bedrock concept. Not only were teachers encouraged to speak freely and give their opinions, they were free to share strategies and information that helped inform instruction. In question 3, a high school teacher reported, "The principal is an active participant because she is a good listener and seeks to understand how to assist teachers and make them successful." As teachers are given the freedom to openly

communicate their feelings, opinions, and expertise, a sense of empowerment evolves. Teacher empowerment allows PLC participants to freely focus on student achievement and to use data when making informed decisions. In question 6, a middle school teacher cited an example of how the principal shared information and then allowed teachers the freedom to make the best decisions for their classes. By sharing information and data, the implied message to teachers is "I trust you with vital information, and I trust your wisdom to make good decisions." A culture of trust is prerequisite for collaboration. In question 6, a middle school teacher stated that "the principal provides an atmosphere of trust and reliability by always being available to offer assistance in all areas concerned with student achievement."

DuFour and Eaker (1998) believed that a change initiative is sustained when it is embedded in the culture of the school. This study shows that established collaboration (facilitated by open communication) is a foundational step to school reform. Further, this study illustrates that school reform is initiated and facilitated (and sustained) when principals intentionally and strategically model collaboration and establish a culture of collaboration.

Theme 2: Shared Leadership and Shared Decision Making

The second theme that emerged from the data is shared leadership. The data showed that the teachers connected shared decision making to shared leadership, implying that shared decision making is a derivative of shared leadership. Nearly 60% of the data obtained from the interviewees referenced decision making. In question 6, an elementary teacher said, "Our principal expects us to make our own decisions." In question 1, a middle school teacher stated that shared decision making was a factor in school reform. The interview data show that the teachers in District M are not afraid to

make decisions in the best interest of students; a clear purpose (the school mission, vision, and goals) drives decisions. The voices of the teachers show how a culture of collaboration and trust precede shared leadership. An elementary teacher answered question 11 by saying, "Teachers are a part of the decision-making process that involves student learning; therefore, our teachers know they are free to voice opinions. Our principal encourages it." Collaboration (major theme) and open communication (minor theme) overlap with the major theme of shared leadership and shared decision making. District M principals are willing to share leadership and authority and participate in PLCs led by teachers without dominating PLCs. That is a form of shared leadership by accountability.

> Highly effective principals maintain a balancing act of "stepping up" (being more directive as needed), and "stepping back" (acting more in a guiding role as appropriate). Over time, a principal who intentionally balances leadership in this way creates a high-functioning team of teacher leaders who, in turn, become increasingly effective, leading their own teams of colleagues. (Wilhelm, 2010, p. 24)

In question 9, a middle school teacher shared, "Our principal is always telling us to use whatever strategies we feel as though are best for students." Teachers derive power from a culture of trust and open communication. Teachers from all grade levels voiced the importance of data-driven decision making. The availability of local, state, and national data facilitates shared decision making. Data is mentioned repeatedly as one consistent system that fosters collaboration.

Consequently, the implications of the theme shared decision making and shared leadership are major for schools in search of change. Shared leadership and shared

decision making are functions of an environment of trust, collaboration, and open communication. When the aforementioned variables shape the school culture, teachers freely share in decision making and leadership.

Theme 3: Established Mission, Vision, Goals, and Purpose

Interviewees from all grade levels eloquently spoke of the importance of mission, vision, goals, and purpose. An elementary teacher said, "The principal's leadership is key in establishing the vision, direction, and mission for the school." Another elementary teacher added, "The principal also explains the expectations and goals for students." When answering question 3, another elementary teacher explained that "our school's mission, vision, and goals are connected to our PLCs." While some interviewees used the terms mission and vision, others used terms such as goals and purpose; they all understood that PLCs are purpose driven. District M teachers discussed mission, vision, goals, and purpose as the driving forces for teacher collaboration; and they connected statements such as "students first" to the mission, vision, goals, and purpose. An elementary teacher stated that the PLCs are focused on working as a team and discussing student achievement. A middle school interviewee revealed that the mission, vision, and goals are posted in the PLC room, throughout the building, and in weekly agendas. In question 2, a high school teacher stated that PLCs in his/her school foster shared decision making. A middle school teacher said, "We are always encouraged to speak frankly and respectfully. Conversations are always kept on target (mission, vision, goals, purpose), and our principal will redirect the conversation to ensure the solution is reached for the original objective." Thus, teachers understand the focus is students first, which supports the mission, vision, goals, and purpose of the school. DuFour and Eaker (1998) believed that the mission [vision, goals, and purpose] of a school should be entrenched into

everyday behaviors and practices. This appears to be the "norm" in District M schools.

When the everyday behaviors of adults are purpose driven and focused on student

learning, school reform occurs and is sustained over time.

Theme 4: Consistent Systems

Interviewees at all grade levels indicated that the principals facilitate PLCs and

foster teacher collaboration by establishing and ensuring consistent systems. For the

purpose of this research, consistent systems are essential components, pertinent

structures, necessities, and any prerequisite requirements that facilitate the smooth

operation and success of PLCs. Consistent systems may include but are not limited to (a)

common planning time for teachers of like subjects; (b) designated time for PLCs; (c)

provisions for needed resources such as meeting spaces, technology, and agendas; (d)

support from curriculum facilitator; (e) research; (f) state and local data; and (g)

articulated vision, mission, goals, and expectations. In question 2, a high school teacher

revealed that "structured time is provided for teachers to work together in planning

instruction, observing each other's classroom, and sharing feedback." An elementary

teacher said, "The principal fosters collaboration by scheduling PLCs with teachers who

teach the same students and who are able to share ideals and connect lessons across the

curriculum." When answering question 7, a middle school teacher explained that systems

in place included common time for teams, resources such as laptops, and data. DuFour

and Marzano (2011) believed that one necessary component for creating effective, high-

performing collaborative teams is embedding time within in the instructional schedule for

teams to collaborate. The interview data show that District M principals fostered teacher

collaboration by establishing consistent systems that connect the mission, vision, and

goals to the work of PLCs. Teachers are inclined to work more collaboratively and focus

on mission, vision, goals, and purpose when they do not have to worry about essential components or systems necessary for successful PLCs.

The sub-question that guided this study queried the identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership. Whether through direct articulation or through implications, three specific behaviors evolved from the data: (a) open communication, (b) shared leadership and decision making, and (c) consistent systems.

Table 18

Behaviors and Supporting Data

Behaviors	Supporting Data Taken from Question 14
Open Communication	Listen to staff Time for meaningful collaboration Answers questions at the end of PLC Listening Trust Openness Continuous discussion Open and effective communication Sharing openly Does not micromanage
Shared Leadership/Shared Decision Making	Sharing in decision making Delegating tasks Valuing input from others Team leaders take initiative Teachers help create agenda topics Highlighting strengths of staff and permitting them to lead Taking the lead to lead others
Consistent Systems	Time for teachers to work together Time set aside Agenda Providing resources

Open communication, a salient behavior used by District M principals to foster teacher collaboration, is a derivative to the major theme of collaboration. Open communication leads to trust and collaboration. The interview data show that District M

principals understand the importance of a culture of trust. A second behavior important to fostering teacher collaboration in District M is shared leadership, which inspires shared decision making. When teachers know there is a culture of trust and open communication, they are empowered to collaborate, analyze data, and make informed decisions in the best interest of their students. Thus, shared leadership and shared decision making emerge. Carroll et al. (2010) proposed that when teachers work collaboratively with the administration and maintain the focus on student achievement, reform occurs. Finally, a resonating behavior that fosters teacher collaboration is the presence of consistent systems. Providing consistent systems ensures that the necessary structures are in place for successful PLCs. DuFour and Fullan (2013) suggested that implementing teams requires a consistent and continuous process and systems that are supportive to the success of what team members are being asked to do.

As a result of district-wide implementation and district-wide PLCs resulting from the U.S. Department of Education grant, District M principals acquired many prerequisite skills necessary for successful PLCs. The monthly district-wide principal PLCs covered all the topics that emerged as major and minor themes. Thus, the principals had firsthand knowledge of the true meanings, values, and benefits of collaboration; shared decision making; focused mission, vision, goals, and purpose; and consistent systems. The deep knowledge of the principals was corroborated repeatedly by the data captured from the interviewees.

In conclusion, this study found that the principals in District M foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership through established collaboration; shared leadership and decision making; established vision, mission, goals, and purpose; and consistent systems. The identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher

leadership in District M are facilitating open communication, encouraging shared leadership and shared decision making, and providing consistent systems. Finally, an affirming discovery from this research study is that the four themes that surfaced from the data and the three identifiable behaviors that emerged from question 14 mostly parallel DuFour and Eaker's (1998) building blocks of PLCs.

Limitations and Assumptions

It may be assumed that the participants answered the interview questions truthfully and accurately based on their personal experiences. Further, it may be assumed that PLCs are operational in each school in District M in accordance with the training provided by the South Carolina University mentors. The limitations of a study are the potential weaknesses over which this research has no control and that may affect the results (Creswell, 2012). A limitation of this study is the scope or the extent of the study. The survey participants were limited to 15 purposefully selected teachers from District M. The participants may or may not be representative of the entire body of potential participants.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this study highlight the strategies used by District M principals when fostering teacher collaboration and shared leadership. Practitioners in the field of education, especially those who work in small, rural districts, may find these strategies helpful and appropriate when implementing the PLC process. Additionally, the new data obtained from the study contributes to the literature and the body of knowledge on teacher collaboration, shared leadership, school reform efforts, PLCs, and the importance of consistent systems to the success of PLCs especially in small, rural school districts. Because there is limited feasibility in making general statements based on the small

sample of participants used in this study, this study indicates the need for future research. Also, future research is needed to determine identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership in schools that become PLCs without a district-wide initiative.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol Questions

The following research questions will guide this qualitative research study:

Central Question: How does principal participation in PLCs foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership?

Subquestions: What are identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership?

The questions for the two interview sessions follow:

Interview Questions

Interview Session One

1. What are some defining characteristics of the PLCs in your school?

2. What is/are the foci of your PLC?

3. How does your principal participate in PLCs?

4. How does your principal and PLC team connect the school's mission, vision, and goals to the work of the PLCs?

5. How does your principal foster teacher collaboration during PLCs?

6. How does your principal create the conditions and/ or environment for successful teacher collaboration (before, during, after PLCs)?

7. What systems (time for PLCs, training, resources, support, etc.) are in place to foster successful teacher collaboration? Who is responsible for putting the systems in place?

Interview Session 2

8. What happens to the culture of collaboration among teachers when your principal is present and participates in PLCs?

9. How does your principal encourage teachers to challenge the status quo?

10. How does your principal foster open communication and meaningful discussions during PLCs?

11. How do the teachers freely voice their opinions when the principal participates in PLC?

12. How does your principal foster shared leadership during PLCs?

13. How do you perceive that the PLC team feels empowered to make decisions that directly impact the quality of student learning when the principal participates in PLCs, or, do the teachers wait on the principal to guide them and tell them what to do? Explain your answer.

14. What are identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership?

Appendix B

Letter Requesting Approval from Superintendent

November 2015

Dear Superintendent of District M,

I am conducting a qualitative study that will analyze the extent to which the principal's participation in professional learning communities impacts teacher collaboration, school culture and ultimately, student achievement. Additionally, this study seeks to determine the impact of teacher collaboration on school re-culturing. I am a graduate student in the doctoral education program at Gardner-Webb University located in Boiling Springs, North Carolina.

The qualitative data for this study will be derived from a fourteen question questionnaire to determine teacher perceptions of the principal's participation in the PLC process, and the extent to which the principal's participation help create a culture of collaboration among teachers. Research will be conducted through two sessions of one-on-one structured interviews. The interviews will take place at District's M conference room. The first interview will address questions 1-7 from the questionnaire and the second interview will address questions 8-14. All interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed for patterns and themes. Each teacher's responses will remain anonymous and participation is voluntary. However, the purposeful sample includes all teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools within the district. From the sample pool, five elementary teachers, five middle school teachers, and five high school teachers will be selected to take part in the two sessions of, one-on-one structured interviews. Only teachers whose principal participated in the full implementation of the US Department of Education grant written by the South Carolina University are eligible for participation in this research.

I am respectfully requesting your permission to conduct this study within your district. I appreciate your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rechel M. Anderson, Primary Researcher
Telephone: XXXXXX
Email: XXXXX

Appendix C

Pre-Notice Email

December 2015

Dear District M School Educator,

A few days from now you will receive an e-mail request asking you to participate in voluntary interview sessions for an important research study being conducted within District M.

The research study is entitled *Does Presence Matter? A Qualitative Exploration of Whether or Not Principal Participation in PLCs Fosters Teacher Collaboration and Teacher Leadership?* This study will analyze the extent to which the principal's participation in professional learning communities impacts teacher collaboration, school culture and ultimately, student achievement. Additionally, this study seeks to determine the impact of teacher collaboration on school reculturing. The qualitative data for this study will be derived from a fourteen question questionnaire to determine teacher perceptions of the principal's participation in the PLC process and the extent to which the principal's participation help create a culture of collaboration among teachers. Research will be collected through two sessions of one-on-one structured interviews. The interviews will take place at District's M conference room. The first interview will address questions 1-7 from the questionnaire and the second interview will address questions 8-14. All interview sessions will be audio recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed for patterns and themes.

I am respectfully writing to you in advance, as well as thanking you for your time and consideration, so that you will know in a timely manner that you will be contacted to complete the survey. The study is an important one that will help determine Professional Learning Community effectiveness and identify any necessary staff development.

Sincerely,

Rechel M. Anderson, Primary Researcher

Telephone: XXXXXXX
Email: XXXXXX

Appendix D

Follow-Up/Request/Reminder

December 2015

Dear District M School Educator,

I am conducting a research project entitled *Does Presence Matter? A Qualitative Exploration of Whether or Not Principal Participation in PLCs Fosters Teacher Collaboration and Teacher Leadership?* This study will analyze the extent to which the principal's participation in professional learning communities impacts teacher collaboration, school culture and ultimately, student achievement. Additionally, this study seeks to determine the impact of teacher collaboration on school reculturing.

A fourteen-question questionnaire was developed to gain responses from individuals one at a time. In order to ensure validity, each interviewee will receive the same ten questions during the two sessions. Specifically, questions 1-7 will be asked during session one, whereas questions 8-14 will be asked during session two. The qualitative data for this study will be derived from questionnaire data to determine teacher perceptions of the principal's participation in the PLC process and the extent to which the principal's participation help create a culture of collaboration among teachers.

Please note that your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and your responses will be confidential. You have the option to choose not to participate in this research study; however, your participation would be instrumental in the success of this study. All data collected will be kept for 5 years after the completion of this study, and any information obtained during this study, which may identify you, will be kept strictly confidential. Confidential data will be destroyed after the researcher has defended the dissertation, but will not be kept more than one year after the completion of the study. The information obtained in this study may be published in professional journals or presented at professional meetings, but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

There are no known risks involved in participating in this study. You have the option to decide not to participate in this study. You may choose to withdraw from continuing to participate in interview sessions, at any time, without harming your relationship with the researcher, Gardner-Webb University of Boiling Springs North Carolina, or District M.

Please contact me with any concerns, questions, or comments you have about this study or the survey at XXXXXXXXX.

Again, I appreciate your time and willingness to share your perceptions and thoughts with me, although your participation in this study is completely voluntary. Sincerely,

Rechel M. Anderson, Primary Researcher
Telephone:
Email:

Appendix E

Interview Introduction

INTERVIEW INTRODUCTION

Gardner-Webb University for the Degree of Doctor of Education

The following introduction will be read at the beginning of each interview session. The purpose of the interview introduction is to provide the interviewee a detailed account of the focus of the study, the researcher's role, the basis for selection of each interviewee, and the context from which the data will be gathered.

Title of Research Study: Does Presence Matter? A Qualitative Exploration of Whether Principal Participation in PLCs Fosters Teacher Collaboration and Teacher Leadership

Focus of the Study: The purpose of this study is to answer whether or not principal participation in PLCs fosters teacher collaboration and teacher leadership? Secondly, if appropriate, this study will capture the identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership.

Researcher's Role: As the researcher, I will introduce myself and obtain all required signatures prior to beginning interview sessions. As the researcher, I will keep all of your responses confidential and solely use data obtained from the audiotaped recordings to support this qualitative research study.

Interviewee Selection: Fifteen participants were purposefully selected from elementary, middle, and high schools within the district. Only schools, within the district whose principal participated in the full implementation of the US Department of Education grant written by the South Carolina University were eligible for participation in this research.

Data Gathering: Once all interviews have been completed, the data from the audiotapes will be transcribed into a word document. The raw data will be broken down into parts and synthesized in order to identify patterns that exist; which is called open coding.

Introduction: It is with much gratitude that you have agreed to participate in this research project to explore the extent to which principal's participation in PLCs foster teacher collaboration. The purpose of each interview is to afford you an opportunity to share your experiences of participating in PLCs. Your responses are voluntary and there is not right or wrong response to a question. Your responses are invaluable to the results of this study. It is helpful for me to audiotape your responses so that I, the researcher, may obtain an accurate account of your responses. Do you agree with me taping our interview session? Do you have any questions before we begin?

Appendix F

Interview and Audiotaped Recording Consent Forms

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Gardner-Webb University for the Degree of Doctor of Education

The purpose of the interview consent form is to obtain agreement from identified participants for this study to participate. The consent form will only be used as a matter of record.

Project Title: Does Presence Matter? A Qualitative Exploration of Whether Principal Participation in PLCs Fosters Teacher Collaboration and Teacher Leadership

Purpose: This purpose of this qualitative research study is to answer whether principal participation in PLCs foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership? If the data shows that principal participation in PLCs does foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership, the participants in this study will be asked what are the identifiable behaviors that foster teacher collaboration and teacher leadership in PLCs.

Benefits: As a participant, you will not receive any monetary compensation in exchange for your participation; however, you may benefit from the study in the following ways: (a) first, the study may provide you with valuable information and awareness on how collaboration can affect the school culture and quality of student work, (b) second, you may gain insight into how administrative participation in PLCs benefits the school as a whole, and (c) third, you may learn how to effectively conduct PLCs in ways that present positive results for student achievement.

Procedures: You have been purposefully selected to participate in this study. You will participate in two one-on-one interview sessions. Each interview session will occur at the district office in the conference room, and will not exceed an hour. There are fourteen questions that will be asked of each participant. Questions 1-7 will be asked during interview session one and questions 8-14 will be asked during interview session two. The interview questions are designed and carefully worded to elicit a narrative response from you. All responses will be audio-taped in order to assist the researcher in maintaining focus on the conversations. At any time during the interview session(s) you may request to decline from responding to a question, and request that the tape recording cease. Your answers are strictly confidential and will be not used in any way other than to provide data for the purpose of this study. Therefore, your honest responses are welcomed.

Confidentiality: Your responses will be kept solely confidential. You will receive electronic notification that your participation is completely voluntary and your responses will remain confidential. All data collected will be kept for 5 years after the completion of this study. Confidential data

will be destroyed after the researcher defended the dissertation, but will not be kept more than one year after the completion of the study. Finally, data collection and analysis strategies will be reported in detail to you in order to provide a clear and accurate picture of the methodology used in this study.

Questions: If you have any questions about this study and the research being conducted, please feel free to ask me during the interview session or you may contact me at XXXXXXXXXX. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Kathi Gibson, via email at XXXXXXXXXX. In addition, you may also contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Gardner-Webb University of Boiling Springs, North Carolina about your rights as a human subject participating in a research study at (704)406-4000.

Your signature below indicates that the researcher has provided a thorough explanation of the focus of the study, the researcher's role, the basis for your selection, answered any questions, provided the context from which the data will be gathered, and that you consent to voluntary participating in this study with the understanding that you may cease from participating at any time.

_____   _____
Participant's Name   Date

_____
Participant's Signature

_____
Researcher's Signature

PERMISSION/CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIOTAPED RECORDING

Gardner-Webb University for the Degree of Doctor of Education

For the purpose of this qualitative research study, an audiotaped recording will be made during each interview session. The purpose of the audiotaped recording is ensure validity and to assist the researcher in maintaining focus on the conversations. All audiotapes will be kept confidential and your name will not be used. Please be reminded that at any time, during an interview session, you may request that audiotaped recording cease. Below, please indicate your consent by initialing beside item number one and signing and dating, as indicated.

_____ 1. The researcher may use the audiotaped recording as data for the sole purpose of this study.

My signature below indicates that I have read the above and I consent to participating in the audiotaped recording, and for the audiotape recording to be used as data for the research study.

_____   _____
Signature   Date   Witness   Date