Fall 10-30-2019

The Influence of Principal Leadership Behaviors on the Development of Professional Learning Communities In Title I and Non-Title I Schools

Alicia Kingcade
alicia.kingcade@student.shu.edu

The Influence of Principal Leadership Behaviors on the Development of Professional Learning Communities In Title I and non-Title I Schools

Alicia Kingcade

Seton Hall University

Dissertation Committee

Martin Finkelstein, Ph.D., Mentor

David B. Reid, Ph. D.

Debra Lane, Ed. D.

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy
Seton Hall University

2019

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

Alicia Kingcade has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the Ed.D. during this **Fall Semester 2019**.

DISSERTATION COMMITTEE
(please sign and date beside your name)

Mentor:
Dr. Martin Finkelstein _____ 10/30/19

Committee Member:
Dr. David Reid _____ 10/30/19

Committee Member:
Dr. Debra Lane _____ 10/30/19

The mentor and any other committee members who wish to review revisions will sign and date this document only when revisions have been completed. Please return this form to the Office of Graduate Studies, where it will be placed in the candidate's file and submit a copy with your final dissertation to be bound as page number two.

Acknowledgments

The journey to obtain my doctorate degree could not have been accomplished without the Heavenly Father. God provided guidance and support throughout this process and allowed me to overcome all barriers that I faced. I lived by the scripture 1 Corinthians 10:13 that God is faithful and he will not put more on me that I cannot bear. I pray, God that you use me to fulfill your destiny which is already set for me and I continue to follow your will.

My greatest appreciation and thanks to my dissertation committee members who provided insight, feedback, and guidance that allowed me to critically think about my dissertation. A special thank you to my advisor, Dr. Finkelstein, for your support, guidance, and vision from the beginning to the end of completing my dissertation. Your methodical thinking pushed me beyond my limits to critically think about my processes and research. You were extremely responsive and worked with me on my unrealistic timelines to completing this dissertation. I appreciate your encouragement and your lasting message "onward" gave me inspiration to continue on this journey. Thank you again for your time, being a thought partner, and for being a responsive mentor.

To Dr. Debra Lane, thank you for eagerly accepting my request to participate on my dissertation committee. You are truly a scholar and tremendous leader from whom I learned so much during this dissertation process. I appreciate your positivity and consistent encouragement throughout the hurdles and barriers I faced. Your expertise in professional development was extremely helpful, which allowed me to explicitly present the most recent research. Thank you again for your time and valuable feedback.

To Dr. David Reid, thank you for stepping in suddenly to serve on my committee. I appreciate your time and support with my dissertation. You challenged my thinking on my

qualitative methods, which helped me to present accurate reasoning for the selection of my methodology. Thank you again for your time and support. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge my original committee member, Dr. Gerard Babo. Dr. Babo was an amazing, caring, and knowledgeable professor both in the classroom and offering guidance with my dissertation. Thank you so much and Rest in Paradise.

To my lovely and dedicated parents, thank you for all your sacrifices and praises to my siblings and me. Thank you, Daddy, for the encouragement, prayers, and well wishes throughout my journey. You taught me to believe that GOD has a plan for me and to stay faithful to his word. Thank you so much for always being proud of me for all my accomplishments and for always being by my side along the way. Thank you, Mommy, for all your lectures and life lessons about working hard, being dedicated, and achieving my best. I'm forever grateful for both of your love and support.

To my closest friends and confidants, thank you for the phone calls of encouragement, hang-outs to keep me sane, and study session companionships. I would not have survived my dissertation journey without my friends helping me to have self-care moments along the way. Thank you to my other half, my twin sister, Ms. Alison Kingcade, for being an inspiration to me every day because of your perseverance. You have taught me to always strive for your dreams even through trials and tribulations. I love you so much and thank you for being you. Thank you to my confidant, Dr. Mojisola Adejumo, for encouraging me to register for the Doctorate program at Seton Hall University and being my study buddy through all my courses. Your determination and drive inspired me to continue with the program and I'm forever grateful for your prayers and positivity.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my biggest encourager, supporter, guider, cheerleader and counselor, which is my mother, Dr. Annie B. Kingcade. My mother inspired me since I was a little girl to accomplish any dream because I'm capable and no one can tell me otherwise. My mother faced many barriers in her childhood that could have prohibited her from pursuing any educational degrees but her determination, stick-to-itiveness, and hard work prevailed that she went against the odds. Thank you for always being in my corner and empowering me to complete this amazing feat. My dissertation is also dedicated to all the students I serve. I hope to be an inspiration to my students so they know that any dream or goal can be accomplished if they put their minds to completing the task.

Abstract

The quest to seek effective school improvement initiatives has been an ongoing challenge for schools across the country. As we continue on this search to find strategies to promote high quality education and improve teaching and learning for all, school leaders are implementing creative approaches to enhance collaboration, learning, and results. This study examined the influence of principal leadership behaviors on the development of professional learning communities (PLC) in Title I and non-Title I schools. The study uncovered specific leadership practices and PLC structures that positively affect the development and sustainability of professional learning communities in two schools within Alexandria City Public Schools. Principals and teachers from two schools participated in the study through interviews and observations of the PLCs. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and school-related documents were analyzed and synthesized to make meaning of the lived experiences of the participants of the professional learning community, understand leadership practices that influence the development of PLCs, and uncover the impact of PLCs' development when there are voluntary and non-voluntary mandates.

The results from the study revealed that the principal leadership behaviors have a strong influence on the development of professional learning communities. Additionally, the results from the study indicated that the principals demonstrating distributive leadership practices have a strong presence in developing PLCs. The findings also presented that shared and supportive leadership, shared vision and values, and supportive conditions have a strong presence when initially developing PLCs within an organizational structure. The results from this study will advise school principals of the leadership practices and the five dimensions of PLC (Hord, 2004a) associated with effective professional learning communities. This study can be used to

guide professional development for school leaders relative to the specific structures, guiding principles, dimensions, or leadership practices that help develop and sustain a collaborative learning culture of professional learning communities in schools.

Keywords: professional learning community, principal leadership, distributive leadership, Title I school, learning, collaboration, shared leadership, supportive leadership, shared vision, supportive relationships.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter I

Introduction

Background of Study

The professional learning community is not a new concept in the business sector. This model of people collaborating to improve practice started in the business world and migrated to education. Educators may have adapted the idea of members within the organization learning together from the business arena. The concept of collaborative organization is to learn from all the collective members and not from one individual in the organization. The cooperative idea is related to Mary Follet's work in 1924 during the human relations movement in the business field. The work supported common practices at work by allowing employees to openly express ideas and opinions without being reprimanded (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). The notion of building a cooperative work environment requires a shift from the factory workers' mindset of stifle ideas to a collaborative mindset that allows employees to share their thoughts freely. The concepts underlying the PLC have been present in U.S. schools for more than 50 years but formalized into PLCs only in the 1990s. The PLC initiative is one of many school reform acts that focus on continuous improvement in student achievement levels. The pressures from the local, federal, and state agencies make school districts implement the necessary changes to address improving student learning, teaching, and achievement scores. The implementation of PLCs has been noted to be the most promising strategy for developing and sustaining student achievement (DuFour, 2007). Professional learning communities force teachers to stop teaching in isolation and to begin to lean on collaboration and influence from colleagues to improve learning and teaching. Shifting to a culture of meaningful collaboration, necessary for the implementation of PLCs, has been described as the most critical factor for sustaining successful

school improvement and overall effectiveness of a school (DuFour & Eaker, 2007).

The Effective School Movement emerged in late 1960s which ignited out of the findings from the Coleman Report.

The Coleman Report encouraged U.S. policymakers to focus on "compensatory programs," which focused on changing the behavior of less advantaged students. Research from the report states that family background and other factors can be a determinant of how students perform on academic achievement. The report also stimulated a reaction from educational researchers who believed, to the contrary, that schools can make a significant difference in student achievement regardless of family background. Their research formed the foundation of the "Effective Schools Movement" and enabled them to assert that "all children can learn and that the school controls the factors necessary to assure student mastery of the core curriculum" (Lezotte, 2001). In light of the Coleman report's findings, the question arises, "Do effective schools exist?"

Policymakers widely embrace the idea of professional learning communities across the world; Finnish models focus on teachers' collective efforts toward student learning and teachers' professional development. In essence, a PLC is a group of professionals committing to learning and teaching to improve student achievement through a collaborative approach that fosters cooperation. A body of researchers in the 1960s-1970s examined school-based factors that impacted the learning and teaching across K-12 schools. The Effective Schools Movement (Edmonds, 1979) occurred to find innovative ways to improve student achievement for all learners. The movement aligns with PLCs through the notion of frequently monitoring student progress and analyzing student data to make decisions about student and teacher learning.

Many researchers believed that the school system plays a vital role in how students

perform academically in school. Researchers tried to locate schools that demonstrate proficiency in educating all students with various backgrounds and socioeconomic status. Edmonds' 1979 article "Effective Schools for the Urban Poor" is noted for drawing professional attention to the effective schools movement in 1960-1970. His factors to promote low-performing schools have become the framework of school improvement. Edmonds outlined six characteristics essential to effective schools:

1. Strong administrative leadership.

2. A climate of high expectations and no child is allowed to fall below the expected level of achievement.

3. An orderly school atmosphere.

4. Basic skills acquisition as the school's primary purpose.

5. Capacity to divert school energy and resources from other activities to advance the school's essential mission.

6. Frequent monitoring of pupil progress.

One strategy that is increasingly being adopted to improve performance is quite an old one — a professional learning community. PLCs first emerged in the 1960s as a way to leverage teacher collaboration to improve student learning ("History of PLC", 2018). This school reform initiative developed because of the educational and research community's emphasis on the need for closing achievement gaps, improving student achievement, and building teachers' capacity.

High expectations and accountability demands placed on school leaders by state and local legislatures have forced school leaders to search for innovative reforms to improve student achievement at their schools. The *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) act has sparked school leaders' interest in initiatives that continuously improve school culture, teachers' learning capacity,

student learning, and student academic outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Professional learning communities (PLCs) have the potential to be a powerful tool for this kind of continuous improvement in school settings. A PLC is a group of educators that meets regularly to share expertise and work collaboratively to improve teaching skills and academic performance of students (DuFour, 2004). Richard DuFour supports the idea of PLCs, helping to increase the probability of sustaining long-term growth in student and adult learning. PLCs are a solution that school leaders can introduce into their school culture to satisfy the high levels of accountability demanded of them and to improve student performance.

The accountability demanded of schools stems from a series of federal laws passed in the past two decades. The U.S. Department of Education, 2018, states the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) Act enacted in 2002 represented a significant step forward for our nation's children in many respects, particularly as it shone a light on where students were making progress and where they needed additional support, regardless of race, income, ZIP code, disability, home language, or background. NCLB put in place measures that exposed achievement gaps between traditionally underserved students and their peers and spurred a critical national dialogue on education improvement. NCLB's focus on accountability has been crucial in ensuring a quality education for all children, yet has also revealed challenges in the effective implementation of this goal (ESSA, U.S Department of Education, 2018). The problems underlying the failure of NCLB are doubts of the effectiveness to improve academic progress in public sectors, focus on test scores on these biased high stakes assessments, and the requirement of highly qualified teachers. There are other factors to consider, such as social-economic status, limited English proficiency, or class sizes that impact student achievement, and NCLB fails to address these considerations. The focus on students receiving high test scores negates the primary goal of

student learning within schools. Teachers receiving highly qualified status have caused huge problems, and there are teacher shortages across the country.

Annual Yearly Progress (AYP), a measure defined in NCLB, looked at gap areas among students with disabilities, economic disadvantage, limited English proficiency, and race. Under the NCLB act, a school that does not meet AYP is labeled as "failing school" or "needs improvement" has to develop an improvement plan with action steps to correct the school's achievement gaps. These corrective action plans can include extending learning opportunities, implementation of research-based curriculum or programs, or allowing turn-around partners from the state to manage the school operations. Some federal officials, parents, and educators across the nation realized that this law required an update to support the schools and strengthen our educational system properly. Other policymakers believed that NCLB would improve test scores, encourage high-quality education for all students, and promote highly qualified teachers in critical areas. While we are still a nation at risk regarding the education of our children, we are also now a nation informed and accountable that recognizes there is much work to be done (U.S. Department of Education, 2008).

During the NCLB era, there was a push for the principal to be an instructional leader and take on many roles and responsibilities to improve student and teacher learning. Instructional leadership involves setting clear goals, managing curriculum, monitoring lesson plans, allocating resources, and evaluating teachers regularly to promote student learning and growth. The quality of instruction and commitment to teaching and learning are the top priorities for the instructional principal (Concordia University, 2013). The current era requires high accountability; many failing schools had to incorporate restructuring practices, so being an instructional leader was not the sole attribute to capture the heart of school administrators but instead helped them evolve

into taking on more appropriate transformational leadership practices (Leithwood, 2005). A school leader needs to go beyond being an instructional leader, only focusing on the quality of instruction, to also focus on the school culture/climate, teacher development, and problem-solving.

In 2010, the Obama administration heard the voices of educators, parents, and policymakers who were unhappy with the restrictive, test-focused philosophy of NCLB and began to work with Congress to pass new legislation that focused on preparing students for college and careers. In 2012, the Obama administration began granting waivers to states regarding specific requirements of NCLB in exchange for rigorous and comprehensive state-developed plans designed to close achievement gaps, increase equity, improve the quality of instruction, and improve outcomes for all students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was passed, including provisions that promote the success of all students and supports innovative and research-based interventions to increase or support student achievement, which expanded the federal government roles in public education. ESSA wants to bring high expectations for students in our low-performing schools to show progress and make significant gains to succeed in life. This law advances equity for the nation's disadvantaged students who have a high need for learning.

History of Professional Learning Communities

Since the 1960s, many educators have believed that an alternative method to isolated teaching in a single classroom is a more collaborative method. In 1989, Susan Rosenholtz characterized "learning enriched schools" as those in which teachers commit to collective learning in collaborative settings to improve teaching practices together (History of PLC, 2018). In the 1990s, this idea formalized into the concept of the PLC, and the concept of PLCs is that

adults will talk collaboratively about teaching and learning and then take action that will improve student achievement. The PLC is a formal collaborative model embedded as a regular component of the teacher's work during the school day (Servage, 2009). DuFour and Eaker (2007) defined PLCs as environments created by educators "that foster cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (p. xii).

Once this phenomenon began to take hold as an effective school reform technique, researchers began to study the effectiveness of PLCs. They have found some positive effects on the school culture, student learning, and teachers' practices. Judith Warren Little and Milbrey McLaughlin reported in 1993 that the most successful schools operate as PLCs that incorporate shared norms/beliefs, collegial relations, collaborative cultures, reflective practices, ongoing inquiry of learning cycles, professional growth, and mutual support and responsibilities (History of PLC, 2018). McLaughlin believed that PLC was the best reform model for school improvement because it builds teachers' capacity and pedagogy knowledge (History of PLC, 2018). Quantitative studies in 1995 by Fred Newman and Gary Wehlage found that most successful school restructuring practices functioned like PLCs and that educators benefited from collective work, focused on a clear and shared purpose, promoted a collaborative culture and collective responsibility for student learning (History of PLC, 2018). Kruse, Louis, and Bryk's findings were similar but added that PLCs operated by reflective dialogue and transformation teaching practice (History of PLC, 2018). In 1998 the gurus of PLCs, Dufour and Eaker, characterized PLCs as driven by three big ideas (Dufour et al., 2013):

1. The relevant question is not, "What is taught?" but instead, "Was it learned?" It shifts the focus from teaching to a focus of learning.

2. Educators must work collectively and collaboratively to address issues that have the most significant impact on student learning.

3. Teams focusing on results must continuously analyze and review relevant and timely data to help drive instructional decisions. To know the extent to which students are learning, educators must continually seek evidence of student learning, then use the information to improve teaching practice.

In 1998, Dufour and Eaker stated in *Professional Learning Communities at Work:*

> If schools are supposed to be effective, they must break from the industrial model and embrace a new model that enables them to function as learning organizations. We prefer characterizing learning organizations as "professional learning communities" for several important reasons. While the term organization suggests a partnership enhanced by efficiency, expediency, and mutual interests, "community" places greater emphasis on relationships, shared ideals, and an influential culture — all factors that are critical to school improvement. The challenge for educators is to create a community of commitment — a professional learning community.

Michael Fullan, a researcher of school reform efforts, believes that professional learning establishes long-lasting collaborative cultures that focus on building the capacity for school improvement and a new way of learning. The school must make educational decisions based on a determination of whether a strategy used has significantly increased student outcomes, then the PLC has focused on education. He cautions school leaders and practitioners to truly study and understand the essential principles behind PLCs before implementing them in their schools. Many schools are engaged in superficial activities that they assume makes them PLCs. He also cautions individual schools about implementing PLCs without the support of their central office

or state and federal guidelines (Fullan, 2006). Lastly, for PLCs to focus on the community, then there needs to be a view of teacher collaboration to improve student achievement (Kukic, 2008).

In terms of professional development, the PLC has been called "the most powerful professional development and change strategy available; when done well, PLCs lead to steady growth in student learning (Provini, 2012). Teachers' professional development has been found to be most effective when it involves collective participation of teachers from the same school, subject, or grade, and includes administrative support for planning and implementing change (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2009; Desimone and Garet, 2015; Yoon et al., 2007). Research from the National Center for Education Statistics using data from 2011-2012 found that 81% of public school teachers participate in collaborative professional development activities (NCES, Public School Teacher Data File). This research found that elementary school teachers participated in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers (84.6% of teachers) more than middle school teachers (83%) and high school teachers (75.9%). Studies have suggested that anywhere from 20 to 100 hours of professional development over 6 to 12 months may be needed to affect teacher practice (Blank & De las Alas, 2009; Desimone & Garet, 2015; Yoon et al., 2007). The need for regular collaborative professional development to be present in the school system is supported by suggestions of effective professional development that should occur over a more extended period.

Statement of the Problem

A concurrent development with the school reform movement and the emergence of PLCs are the foundation for continuous school improvement and an increase in student achievement. The focus has been on the role of the principal as the instructional leader and enhancing school performance. The principal's perspective and understanding of the purpose of PLCs can support

or damage the development of collaborative work among the teachers. School staff can determine whether the leadership supports PLCs through the commitment of providing sufficient time to meet, resources, level of accountability, and participation. The school principal is the catalyst for establishing trust, promoting a collaborative culture, and providing support, which is essential to the development of the PLC. Schools that have effective PLC structures in place may have principals who practice distributive leadership behaviors that support the idea of bringing teachers together to work collaboratively toward school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 2008).

A great deal of literature exists on the principal's role in improving student achievement and on how to implement PLCs, but there is only limited research to date regarding how principals' leadership behaviors can affect the development of PLCs. Schools need to follow the guiding principles of PLCs, but there is limited literature regarding implementing PLCs on voluntary and compulsory measures. Based on Title I funding grants, schools receiving Title I funds are sanctioned to implement reform efforts such as PLCs, but non-Title I schools can implement PLCs voluntarily.

The proposed study will investigate the influence of the principal's leadership behaviors on implementing PLCs and show the function of PLCs based on a voluntary or non-voluntary basis because of the Title I status of schools. In an era of high accountability measures and significant demands on the school principal, the school leader must find innovative ways to build a positive school culture and improve student achievement. This study will explore the specific leadership practices that a principal must employ to develop PLCs and if there are any differences in how a PLC functions in a Title I versus non-Title I school.

The literature shows that the principal has the power to influence PLCs by developing

structures and providing supportive conditions to help teachers collaborate, learn, and try new ideas. Principals who want to embrace the PLC process must go beyond being managers and policy implementers to create a collaborative environment for teachers and promote a culture of continuous learning for both teachers and students.

The crux of this study fills the gap in the literature by going beyond the theoretical concepts of principal leadership practices of distributive leadership and specific practices that are empirically grounded to provide guidance for implementing effective PLCs in schools. More research needs to be conducted to understand how a principal's leadership behaviors and voluntary and required participation in PLCs affect the PLCs' guiding principles.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explain to what extent principal leadership behaviors affect the function of PLCs and to understand the role of PLCs in voluntary and required context. The research study will seek to uncover principal leadership behaviors that influence the implementation of PLCs in elementary schools with a diverse student population and understand the differences presented in the PLC level of functioning based on a school's Title I or non-Title I status. Utilizing the three guiding principles of PLCs as a means of understanding the function level of the PLC, this study will examine if the principal's leadership behaviors make an impact on the implementation of PLCs in elementary schools.

Research Questions

This study examines how elementary school principals utilized specific leadership behaviors to support the establishment and maintenance of PLCs. The research questions for the study are:

1. How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in

Title I and non-Title I schools?

2. To what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the gap of educational leadership literature on the sustainability of professional learning communities by illuminating the principals' leadership behaviors that influence the development of PLCs. Having a better understanding of the principal's role that affects the functionality of the PLC has the potential to focus the PLC's actions to have a direct influence on teachers' and students' learning (Dufour, R. & Marzano, R. J, 2011). Schools that have professional learning communities structures in place may have principals who practice distributive or shared leadership behaviors that support the idea of bringing teachers together to work collaboratively toward school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 2007).

With every technological innovation, the world is changing, and the structure of teaching and learning in isolation has become obsolete. The PLC process provides a vehicle for focused interactions between principals and teachers (Dufour, R. & Marzano, R. J, 2011). The findings of this study seek beyond proven leadership practices of successful principals that develop PLCs and emphasize that professional learning communities can be sustainable through intentional leadership practices and schoolwide collaborative structures. There is a plethora of research on ways to implement effective PLCs but this study highlights specific principal behaviors that influence effective implementation of PLCs are scarce (Pirtle, S., & Tobia, E., (2014); Hord, S., (2004); Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008).

Conceptual Framework

This study will explore leadership behaviors that influence the implementation of PLCs

and how PLCs function in Title I and non-Title I elementary schools. The study may help to reveal how PLCs develop teachers' collaborative work, learning capability, and shared a focus on student learning. The theoretical principles underlying this study come from Social Capital Theory as it relates to distributed leadership styles, collective actions, professional learning communities, and shared values, goals, and trust. Social capital may be defined as those resources inherent in social relations that facilitate collective action (Claridge, 2004). Social capital resources include trust, norms, and networks of the association representing any group that gathers consistently for a common purpose (Harvard University-PA 765).

Social capital theory aligns with the guiding principles of PLC, specifically in the social context of building a trusting relationship with colleagues to support each other in reaching a common goal. It is imperative within a school organization to have a shared vision or mission to create a structure for group collaboration to support collective actions that will benefit the organization. The main dimensions of social capital are (Caldridge, 2004):

1. Trust
2. Rules and norms governing social interaction
3. Types of social interactions
4. Network resources

Other researchers have identified four aspects of social capital that are similar to the above — informal social ties, formal social ties, trust, and norms of collective action/social relationships — and are critical elements of thriving professional learning communities (Tsia & Ghoshal, 1998). The understanding of social capital theory will help an organization to build a collaborative and dependable network of individuals that can achieve desired goals collectively.

Different types of social capital can exist within a community or a school grade level or

department, and all are relevant to the work of PLCs. Bonding social capital is pertinent to PLCs as connections within a group or community characterized by high levels of similarity in demographic characteristics, attitudes, and available information and resources (Claridge, 2018), which are present in PLCs from less diverse school and teacher populations. This type of social capital allows for opportunities to build trust and strong ties, and to become interconnected with others within the network. Structural social capital, by contrast, aligns with PLCs as they both mutually support collective actions through established roles, social networks, agreements, and precedents (Claridge, 2018), which is vital to establish norms. Establishing rules can help peers within the PLC to exchange or transfer knowledge and explore the mutual benefits from the collective shared goal free from judgment and in a respectful manner. Cognitive social capital is shared understandings, values, attitudes, and beliefs (Ghoshal, 1998), which is a similar belief of the PLC guiding principle to focus on collaboration and establish a shared vision. The emphasis on community supports that colleagues must share the same understanding of school goals and have the same belief of high levels of learning to support student learning is aligned to cognitive social capital. Relational social capital is trust, trustworthiness, norms, and sanctions (Ghoshal, 1998). The professional learning community must develop trust through the exchange of knowledge and openness to share expertise. An established set of norms can support collaborative and healthy discourse among members, so a culture of mutual respect and trust can be developed (History of PLC, 2018). Social capital theory dimensions are applicable and certainly aligned to guiding principles of PLCs.

Figure 1 is modified based on this dissertation conceptual framework from Shorter, Casey D., "The Relationship Between Principals' Leadership Behaviors and the Development of Professional Learning Communities in Schools with Teacher Study Groups" (2012). Seton Hall

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework (2012)

Figure 1 illustrates the connections and how distributed leadership, shared school values and goals, PLCs, and collective action centers on the social capital theory and trust. The critical area that a leader with distributed styles must build is trust within the school and PLC to develop an environment that is safe for learning. The primary foundation of social capital is the development of trust within relationships. A distributive leader must have an openness to share responsibility, a vision, goals, trust, group norms, collective actions, and values to benefit the group's goals.

Limitations

This study outlines the leadership behaviors of principals who implement PLCs in their schools as a reform initiative for improving student outcomes and the functioning of PLCs in compulsory or voluntary context. The following factors presented limitations to this study:

1. This study was limited demographically to a small school district in Alexandria, Virginia with a student population of 15,000.
2. The study is limited to the teachers' perception of their principal's leadership practices.

3. The study is limited to two elementary schools in a small district in Alexandria, Virginia.
4. The study is limited to one Title I school and one non-Title I school.
5. The completion of interviews is strictly voluntary by the participants completing the interview questions.
6. Perceptions of those who participated are not factual information and are biased based on the participants' own experiences and attitudes.

Delimitations

Delimitations narrow the scope of the study. The following were delimitations of this study:

1. The study included only teachers from one school district in Alexandria, Virginia, who have implemented the PLC initiative.
2. The study included teachers from Title I and non-Title I elementary schools.
3. Participation in this study is voluntary.

Definition of Terms

Collaboration: A process when "members of a team will work interdependently to achieve a common goal" and focus on the right work (Dufour, 2013).

Distributed Leadership: A leadership practice that equates with shared, collective, and extended leadership practices that build the capacity for change and improvement (Harris, 2014).

Every Student Succeeds Act: An act signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015. The bipartisan measure reauthorizes the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the nation's national education law, and longstanding commitment to equal opportunity for all students (U.S. Education Department, 2018).

Instructional Leadership: A model of leadership that proposes three dimensions of

instructional leadership construct: defining the school's mission, managing the instructional program, and promoting a positive school learning climate (Harris, 2014).

Professional Learning Community: A professional staff of teachers and administrators who continually seek and share learning, and act on their learning, conceptualized as five related dimensions that reflect the essences of a professional learning community: shared and supported leadership, shared vision and values, collective learning and application, supportive conditions and shared personal practice (Hord, 1996).

Standards of Learning: A public school standardized testing program in the Commonwealth of Virginia. It sets forth learning and achievement expectations for core subjects for grades K-12 in Virginia's Public Schools (Virginia Department of Education, 2018).

Student Achievement: Measures the amount of academic content a student learns in a determined amount of time. Each grade level has learning goals or instructional standards that educators are required to teach.

Title I: Part A (Title I) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds allocations are through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state.

Transformational Leadership: The behavior of the principal that fosters a climate among people within the organization to accept shared goals and identifies the practices to be used in the achievement of these goals. Transformational leaders share power and facilitate a

school development process that engages the human potential and commitment of teachers (Leithwood, 2005).

Organization of the Study

This is a qualitative study to determine the influence of principals' leadership behaviors on the development and function of PLCs involuntary or voluntary context at elementary schools. Chapter I includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, theoretical framework, limitations/ delimitations of the study, and definition of terms relevant to the study. Chapter II reviews the literature on the influences of principals' leadership styles and the effective functions of professional learning communities. Chapter III describes the methodology, the study design, instrumentation, participants, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter IV covers the findings of the study, data analysis, and descriptive summary. Chapter V provides a conclusion that includes recommendations for school policy, school districts, and practitioners for future studies.

Summary

School districts are always looking for ways to improve student achievement, build positive school culture, and determine principals' success in making a school effective. This study may help to show that PLCs support shared goals for students' and teachers' learning, teachers' collaborative work efforts, and students' results. The findings may support the notion that the school principal is the catalyst for establishing trust, promoting a collaborative culture, and providing support to develop professional learning communities in the school (Zheng, X., Yin, H., Liu, Y., & Ke, Z., 2016).

Chapter II

Review of the Literature

Since the early 1980s, school districts across various counties have given schools autonomy to make decisions about conducting specific assessments, content, texts, and courses. The rationale was to raise performance levels by encouraging responsiveness to student and school needs at the local level (Whitty, 1997; Carnoy, 2000; Clark, 2009; Machin &Vernoit, 2011). School autonomy to make its own decisions can vary depending on the schools' accreditation status. Based on the Nation at Risk report, there was a shift from local school districts having the autonomy to the state and federal governments having control over school improvement efforts (Gardner, D., & Others, A., 1983). The thought of school reform has spread across the nation and internationally, which has made educational leaders compare school systems. School reform efforts have led to a focus on results and high accountability measures for school success. PLC is one mechanism for engaging teachers in focusing their energies on collaborative practices that achieve results. The emphasis on PLCs became prevalent when school leaders examined how they could improve overall school culture and student outcomes.

In education, we have normed the idea of teachers going into their individual rooms and closing the doors and expecting positive student outcomes. PLCs are more than just the flavor of the year or an innovative technique that can be easily discarded once things get challenging. PLC is a systemic, continuous improvement process that holds a meaningful and permanent process of how individuals collaborate. The idea of working in isolation is not the best practice anymore, but rather working in a collaborative team to achieve a common goal for which all members are held mutually accountable.

The emergence of PLCs was further supported through the work of Richard Dufour

(2004), who initially labeled professional learning communities as an alternative professional development. He believed instead of treating professional development as a separate entity, teacher improvement should be a natural by-product of more extensive organizational management strategies that encourage teacher collaboration, dialogue, and reflection (Dufour, 2004). The underlining Nation At Risk report caused this change in professional development for teachers, which required them to rethink their teaching practices by playing dual roles as a teacher and learner.

The literature review will examine the practice of PLCs as a reform effort to improve student outcomes, teachers' performance, and overall school practices. The study will begin by reviewing the origin of school leadership and define various leadership styles closely related to the principles of a professional learning community. Next, the review of the literature will examine the role of the principal as it relates to the school climate and the development of professional learning communities. Finally, the review of the literature will describe the characteristics of PLC and the effect of educational leadership behaviors on professional learning communities, teacher and student learning, school culture, and student achievement.

Effective Schools Movement

Effective School is an educational movement that studied school-influenced factors that support positive learning outcomes in K-12 schools. The findings of the Coleman Report concluded that student socio-economic status and background impacted student achievement and initiated the controversy on how successful schools are responsible for students' outcomes. Educational researchers of the Coleman report believed that the schools make a significant difference in students' learning and made claims that all children can learn, so the schools control the factors necessary to assure student mastery of the core curriculum (Lezotte, 2001).

The need for the Effective Schools movement was to prove that schools' educational programs are a contributing factor to student achievement and outcomes.

Edmonds' publication about characteristics of effective schools correlates five key elements that describe the success of a school that meets the needs of all learners. Edmonds describes these associations of effective schools as the following (Lezotte, 2001):

1. the leadership of the principal notable for substantial attention to the quality of instruction;
2. a pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus;
3. an orderly, safe climate conducive to teaching and learning;
4. teacher behaviors that convey the expectation that all students are expected to obtain at least minimum mastery;
5. the use of measures of pupil achievement as the basis for program evaluation.

The third key element is aligned explicitly to PLC's guiding principle of a focus on learning. The very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student (DuFour, R., DuFour, R., 2013, pp. 2–4). The critical element of teaching and learning is directly aligned to the success of schools to improve achievement for all learners. The key element #5 associates with PLC's guiding principle focus on results. This focus on results leads each team to develop and pursue measurable improvement goals that are aligned to school and district goals for learning (DuFour, R., DuFour, R., 2013, pp. 2–4).

In 1991, Lezotte published Correlates of Effective Schools: The First and Second Generation, describing the "Seven Correlates of Effective Schools":

1. Instructional leadership.
2. Clear and focused mission.

3. Safe and orderly environment.
4. The climate of high expectations.
5. Frequent monitoring of student progress.
6. Positive home-school relations.
7. Opportunity to learn and student time on task.

In conclusion, the effective school movement helps to establish reflective and transformational and instructional leadership principles that focus on improving the school dynamics to enhance outcomes. Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2004) reported that effective school leadership substantially boosts student achievement. The overall understanding of this movement embraced instructional leadership practices and opportunities for all to learn. This movement supports the need to eliminate teacher isolation to improve student outcomes and to focus on a collaborative learning enriched atmosphere. The role of PLCs is to promote a school climate of high expectations for staff and students.

Title I

Title I existed since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The Title I act originated when the federal government authorized grants to states and districts with low academic achievement for schools with low socioeconomic status. If a school has a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students, then the school can receive Title I status to provide federal funding assistance and resources. Schools with a minimum of 35% of their student population receiving free or reduced lunch can qualify for Title I support, thus, agreeing to the requirements mentioned above (McCargar, 2003). The purpose of Title I law is for all children to have an equal and fair opportunity to high-quality education and to meet state academic standards (US Department of Education, 2018). Achieving this purpose means closing

the academic achievement gap between disadvantaged and advantaged children. Title I schools can target and distribute educational resources to address areas for improvement. The idea is to provide decision-making authority to teachers, who are the professional educators, rather than the state. The purpose can also be achieved by strengthening accountability, learning, and teaching to ensure students meet challenging academic demands and increase student achievement in disadvantaged students. Federal funds are allocated to Title I schools to support the attainment of the school goals. Title I schools can implement scientifically based instructional strategies as a schoolwide reform to elevate the quality of instruction and provide staff with opportunities for professional development.

Principal Leadership Orientation

School leadership, often used synonymously with educational leadership, is the process of enlisting and guiding the talents and energies of teachers, students, and parents toward achieving common educational goals (Wikipedia, Educational Leadership). In today's society, school leaders must be able to simultaneously manage school operations, instruction, and human relational situations while improving student achievement. The balanced leadership entails the relationship, advocacy, culture, and educational quandaries that go together through the view of structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frame approaches (Bolman & Deal, 2013). With continually changing school reform efforts, there must be strong administrative leadership present to have an effective school (Edmonds, 1979; & Lezotte (2001).

An inordinate amount of research has expressed the critical need for effective school leadership. The major leadership models reflecting the importance of having effective professional learning communities are instructional, transformational, distributive, and situational. This section will address the definition, historical emergence, outcomes, and

limitations of these four educational leadership styles. The above-mentioned educational leadership styles will be explored in this study because of their characteristics being aligned with the guiding principles of professional learning communities.

Educational Leadership

Educational leadership encompasses many forms of leadership that have influenced reform efforts over the past decades. The most dominant forms of educational leadership that can improve schools are instructional, transformational, and distributive. The primary work of educational leadership is to guide improvements in learning, so the leader's work starts and ends with individual students and their learning (Copland, A., & Knapp, M. S., 2006). Educational leadership is an attribute of the organization as a whole, and leadership is not only embedded in formal positions of authority, but also in functions that cut across positions such as professional development, professional accountability, and curriculum development (Copland, M. et al., 2006). Educational leadership includes the leader's actions, feelings, studies, and tools to support an organizational community. Educational leaders must know the effective dimensions of leadership that can help facilitate, support, and build a school that is successful in implementing professional learning communities. School leaders must have a clear vision for powerful, equitable learning and support continuing opportunities to further that vision. The dominant model of leadership focuses on the skills and abilities of the leader, which has shown to be severely limited in generating and sustaining school change (Fullan, 2001). The skills and knowledge that shape leadership practice has not directly focused upon the improvement of instruction and student performance, but focus on controlling the organization (Harris, 2014). In other words, there is no way to perform complex school reform efforts without widely distributing the responsibility for leadership among roles in the school organization. Literature

highlights that distributed leadership is mostly present in schools that implement professional learning communities. Research shows a positive relationship between shared leadership and improved organizational performance. The differences between high performing and low performing schools can be attributed to different degrees of leadership distribution. In schools that are not in either of the failing categories but are steadily improving, the potential for alternative leadership styles and leadership approaches, such as distributive leadership, clearly exist (Harris, 2014).

Instructional Leadership

In his study titled Equality of Education Opportunity, also known as the Coleman Report, James Coleman (1966) summarized that the background and socio-economic status of a student determined the success of the school, how students performed on academic achievement, and that the school was limited in educating students from disadvantaged backgrounds Many researchers disagreed with this notion, and this triggered scholars to perform a full investigation of Coleman's findings. Instructional leadership appeared as a result of research associated with the effective school movement of the 1980s, which revealed that the key to running successful schools lies in the principals' role (Edmonds, 1980). The effective school movement arose from the debate about the claims of the Coleman Report, which concluded that strong instructional leadership is a clear factor of effective schools. During this time, the school principal's role changed to "instructional leader," and this role encourages principals to implement strategies to have an effective school.

Instructional leadership is generally defined as the management of curriculum and instruction by a school principal (Wikipedia, Instructional Leadership). Some researchers would say that to have strong instructional leadership, a leader must establish a learning climate that

minimizes disruptions and maximizes learning opportunities. A school culture that focuses on excellence and high expectations of students and a structure of clear teaching objectives has strong leadership. Hallinger and Murphy's (1985) conceptual model proposed the key role of instructional leaders in three dimensions: 1) Defining the school mission, 2) Managing the instructional program, and 3) Promoting a positive school-learning climate. These three dimensions helped principals to have different functions to develop a supportive and working environment. The instructional leadership style is closely aligned to John Maxwell's levels of leadership, specifically level-3 Production. The production level of leadership focuses on organizational, team, and individualized results that make a significant impact. The leader understands the higher levels of accountability for improving student achievement; the leader demonstrates self-discipline, work ethic, and is knowledgeable of skills to be productive and produce desirable results (Maxwell, 2003).

The limitation of instructional leadership is the identification of a narrow role of the principal confined to developing instructional activities for student performance (Hallinger, 1985). Theories behind instructional leadership do not consider the nature of the principal role as the manager of the school.

Transformational Leadership

James McGregor Burns theorized that transformational leadership is when leaders advance to a higher level of morality and motivation through the strength of their vision and personality. This type of leadership inspires followers to change expectations, perceptions, and motivations to work toward common goals (Hallinger, 2003). The work of Leithwood and his colleagues created a transformational leadership model comprised of seven components: individualized support, shared goals, vision, intellectual stimulation, culture building, rewards,

high expectations, and modeling.

School reformers began to study a new approach to educational leadership in contrast to the top-down approach of instructional leadership and focused on the bottom-up approach to school improvement (Hallinger, 2003). Transformational leadership is the approach that the leadership is shared and distributed among the teachers and the principals acting on the idea that the principal does not work alone in building an effective school. Another distinction of transformational leadership focuses on building relationships and seeking to create the future by building capacity and extending the aspirations of the teachers in the organizational community (Hallinger, 2003). Transformational leaders engage teachers in continuous learning and routinely sharing with others while working with each other to identify shared personal goals aligned to school goals (Barth, 1990; Lambert, 2002; Hallinger, 2003).

The limitation of the transformational leadership approach can be viewed as the leader is more interested in building relationships with teachers and not focused on learning. Based on John Maxwell's work on the five levels of leadership, the level-2 leadership is Permission, which focuses on the leader beginning to influence people with relationships and not just position (Maxwell, 2003). The teachers feel liked, cared for, valued, and trusted, so they begin to work together with the leader and each other to transform the work and learning environment. Also, studies of transformational leadership are more likely to include outcome variables such as teacher engagement, teacher perceptions of change and improvement, and student engagement with the school (e.g., Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999a, 2000a; Hallinger, 2003). These are variables to consider when leaders use transformational leadership approaches to transform good schools into great schools. Transformational school leaders will continue to find ways to improve teacher and student performance through reform initiatives, such as professional learning

communities.

Distributive Leadership

Distributive leadership equates with shared, collective, and extended leadership practice that builds the capacity for change and improvement (Harris, 2014) within teachers' learning and organization. The Level 4 leadership concept by John Maxwell states that people development creates high-productivity teams, departments, and organizations which align to a high-level of leadership ability that develops others (Maxwell, 2003). The role of people development can revolutionize a school organization to focus on the production achieved by others and the development of their potential.

To have genuine distributive leadership requires high levels of trust, transparency, and mutual respect. Principals have a key role in creating these conditions for distributed leadership to occur, and they have to create opportunities for others to lead efforts in decision making (Harris, A., 2014). Some school leaders face challenges of organizational trust, individual threat, and the fear of giving others real and authentic responsibility. When distributed leadership works well, individuals are accountable and responsible for their leadership actions. New leadership roles are created, collaborative teamwork is well-established, and interdependent working is a cultural norm (Harris, 2014).

School leaders embracing distributive leadership are strong in several emotional intelligence competencies: self-control, adaptability, empathy, organizational awareness, conflict management, and clear and direct communication (Ferry, K., 2017). Research by Silns and Mulford (2002) has shown that student outcomes are likely to improve where distributed leadership is throughout the school community (Harris, 2014). In the way of promoting shared leadership roles, this form of leadership allows schools to be a professional learning community

that maximizes the leadership capabilities of all members on the team.

Situational Leadership

Theorists Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard developed situational leadership theory, which refers to the leader adjusting his or her style to fit the development level of the followers he or she is trying to influence (Hersey-Blanchard, 1996). Situational leadership focuses on the premise that effective leaders lead through the idea that their leadership style must change based on the ability and maturity levels of the ones being led (Hersey-Blanchard, 1996; Bolman & Deal, 2013). The Situational leadership model developed by Hersey and Blanchard has two pillars: leadership style and maturity level of those being led. The following displays four basic leadership behaviors and levels of maturity that the followers can possess according to the Hersey-Blanchard theory (1996):

1. The subordinate of very low maturity who should benefit from a "directing" style of supervision.
2. The subordinate of moderately low maturity who should benefit from a "coaching" style of supervision.
3. The subordinate of moderately high maturity who should benefit from a "supporting" style of supervision.
4. The subordinate of very high maturity who should benefit from a "delegating" style of supervision.

The following are the four levels of maturity that Hersey-Blanchard situational leadership theory identifies:

1. The enthusiastic novice lacks the specific skills required for the job at hand, and is willing to work at the task.

2. The disillusioned learner is more able to do the task; however, is demotivated for this job or task. The learner is unwilling to do the task.
3. The capable but cautious performer is experienced and able to do the task but lacks the confidence or the willingness to take on responsibility.
4. The self-reliant achiever is experienced at tasks and comfortable with his or her ability to do it well. This individual is able and willing to not only do the task but to take responsibility for the task.

The limitations of situational leadership theory are that administrators make decisions based on the development level of followers and task complexity instead of the leaders' beliefs. This leadership model is still known as a practical leadership approach and greatly recommended in the educational field.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a strong educational leadership style is required to have an effective school with high expectations for student learning, teacher learning, collaboration, and positive school culture. Research conducted by Brookover (1979); Edmonds (1979); and Rutter, Maughn, Mortimore, & Ouston (1979) discovered that necessities of effective schools include strong leadership, an orderly but not rigid atmosphere, a climate of expectation, and effective communication. Research shows that although the quality of teaching has a powerful influence on pupil motivation and achievement, the quality of leadership determines the motivation of teachers and the quality of teaching in the classroom (Fullan, 2006). The absence of a strong educational leader will impact the school climate and teachers' attitudes, which can influence overall student outcomes and learning environment for teachers and students.

The Role of the Principal in School Culture, Climate, and Trust

Pressures school principals have to face on the importance of school culture and climate in their schools has grown as critical areas. Administrators' evaluations have at least one standard tied to the school climate. The school climate standard in evaluations demonstrates how the school leader's behaviors influence school culture, student outcomes, and teacher satisfaction. Hoy, Tarter, and Kottkamp (1991) define school climate as the quality of the school environment that is affected by principals, their behaviors, and collective perception of behaviors. Researchers shared that a positive school climate can improve student achievement, enhance teacher satisfaction, and promote strong morale.

Education leadership is possibly the most important single determinant of an effective learning environment (Kelley, R. C., Thornton, B., & Daugherty, R., 2005). Over the long term, satisfied teachers form a positive school culture and have a significant impact on student outcomes (Leithwood, 2007). A principal must be able to shape the school culture so the students will learn and flourish. A study of the relationship between leadership style and school climate conducted by Kelley, Thornton, and Daugherty (2005) discovered results that teachers' perceptions of their principals' effectiveness are related to school climate. Ubben and Hughes (1992) stated that principals could create a school climate that improves the productivity of both staff and students and that the leadership style of the principal can foster teacher effectiveness (Kelly, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). The principal who has the ability to be a reflective leader by improving his/her leadership capability can determine the attitudes and perceptions of the teachers in the work environment. The school leader is extremely involved in the school culture to ensure positive effects for all stakeholders.

Sweeney and Winter (1994) interviewed 32 teachers in their empirical study about school climate, and found that teachers felt that the principal played the most important role in

fashioning a school's climate. The teachers felt that the support a principal provided was a key to the climate of a school. The interviews led to the identification of three types of administrative support that affect school climate: recognizing achievement, backing up and encouraging teachers, caring and administering school rules fairly (Osman, 2012). The recommendations from the findings can promote a positive school climate that impacts a healthy work environment. A meta-analysis empirical study conducted by Marzano et al. (2005) concluded that principal leadership styles have a positive and significant relationship with student learning, and the study defined a link between leadership, school culture, and achievement. Concluded in the findings, the researchers described that key leadership behaviors should promote a sense of well-being, foster cohesion among all staff, and develop a purpose and shared vision among staff (Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. et al., 2005). All of these leadership behaviors related to school culture and school culture is a direct link to student achievement.

An empirical study conducted by Hoy and Sweetland (2000), where they included 116 diverse schools from Ohio, Michigan, New Jersey, Virginia, and New York, analyzed the validity of enabling bureaucracies and how it relates to collegial trust. They theorized that enabling bureaucracy should promote a sense of trust among teachers, and teacher trust of colleagues should promote a climate in which enabling bureaucracy could function effectively (Hoy & Sweetland, 2000). The results concluded that the more schools practice an enabling bureaucratic structure, then the greater extent of collegial trust among teachers exists. Enabling bureaucracies must include procedures that allow two-way communications between staff, foster a school climate that views problems as opportunities, encourage differences, and promote trust within. The study's findings show that the staff is willing to trust each other and make mistakes

in social contexts if the school climate is open and positive. In this empirical study, teachers reported that some rules help and some hierarchies facilitate teaching and learning can reduce teacher alienation and foster trust among colleagues (Hoy, W. K., & Sweetland, S. R., 2000). It is critical to have the capability of trusting your colleagues and being collegial during the PLC. Trusting colleagues helps members in the PLC to show a willingness of vulnerability to another party if the party is benevolent, reliable, and competent.

The principal's major role is to provide the staff with information, the expectations, the support, and the supervision, so the staff serves as mediators and transmitters of the principal's expectations (Osman, 2012). Based on the literature, having a positive school culture is one component of effective schools, and the principal plays a major role in the shape of the school culture. The principal can influence the school culture, and school culture can impact student achievement.

Adult Learning Theory

The theory of adult learning is an old concept studied since the 1980s in the education field. The adult learning theory helps us to gain a broader understanding of how adults learn, which can contribute to the understanding of how teachers learn in the work environment. This theory supports educators with creating professional development centered on assumptions and principles about adult learners. Professional learning communities are a form of professional development that allows teachers to learn together in a social context to reach a shared goal.

Malcolm Knowles has established assumptions and principles on adult learning, which has helped shaped adult education to this day. Malcolm Knowles (1980) has coined the word andragogy, which is synonymous with adult education and defines it as the "art and science of adult learning." Andragogy is compared to pedagogy, which is helping children learn, so

andragogy is helping adults learn. Andragogy and self-directed learning continue to be important to our present-day understanding of adult learning (Meriam, 2007). Knowles (1984) made assumptions about adult learners, which brought him to add a fifth assumption to his original list from 1980. The five assumptions are:

1. Self-Concept: As a person matures, his/her self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward one of being a self-directed human being.
2. Adult Learner Experience: As a person matures, he/she accumulates a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasing resource for learning.
3. Readiness to Learn: As a person matures, his/her readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of his/her social roles.
4. Orientation to Learning: As a person matures, his/her time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application. As a result, his/her orientation toward learning shifts from subject centeredness to problem centeredness.
5. Motivation to Learn: As a person matures, the motivation to learn is internal.

Based on his assumptions, Knowles (1984) suggested four principles that apply to adult learning:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.
3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance to and impact on their job or personal life.
4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

Knowles emphasizes the relevancy of psychological climate for adults in a school environment.

"The psychological climate should be one which causes adults to feel accepted, respected, and supported; in which there exists a spirit of mutuality between teachers and

students as joint inquirers; in which there is freedom of expression without fear of punishment or ridicule. People tend to feel more "adult" to an atmosphere that is friendly and informal, in which they are known by name and valued as unique individuals" (Knowles, 1980, pg. 47).

"The idea of the climate of adultness should be extended beyond individual classrooms and applied to an institution" (Knowles, 1980), which is the same concept behind the basis of professional learning communities. Similar to Hord's (2004) definition, "a PLC is a professional community of learners in which the teacher in a school and the administration shares and seeks learning, and acts on their learning." The principles of adults working together should reflect in common policies, procedures, leadership styles, and human relations within the school institution. It will show that the educational facility cares about the learning of students and adults.

Theorists and scholars have examined and critiqued the adult learning theory for over two decades. Knowles believed that adult learning theory is the study to understand how to help adults learn (Pappas, 2013). Hanson (1996) argues the difference in learning is not related to the age and stage of one's life but is instead related to individual characteristics and the differences in "context, culture and power" within different educational settings. Knowles contemplated whether andragogy only applied to adults and believed that "pedagogy-andragogy represents a continuum from teacher-directed to student-directed learning. Both approaches are appropriate for children and adults, depending on the situation" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 87). Merriam critiqued Knowles's findings that the self-concept does not apply to all adult learners because not all adult learners will know what they want to learn in a course and may seek a more structured outline from an instructor. An instructor cannot assume that an adult will desire self-directed learning in every situation (Merriam, 2007). J.R. Kidd goes further by

claiming that principles of learning have to be applied to lifelong development and suggests that building a theory on adult learning would be meaningless, as there is no real basis for it (Newton, E., 1977). One theory by P. Jarvis implies that the understanding of supporting lifelong adult education would be more the result of an ideology than a scientific contribution to the comprehension of the learning processes (Jarvis, P., 2004). Malcolm Knowles's research could be a set of best practices that could be useful for students and adult learners.

Adult learning theory suggests that teachers can be trained among colleagues with whom they feel safe and with whom there is potential for collaboration (Merriam, 2001). The key concepts of adult learning theory reflect the need for experiential learning, self-directed learning, motivational learning, and readiness to learn while incorporating the ideas of shared inquiry and social context-based learning. Adult learning theory supports the constructivist leader approach as it relates to the belief of the reciprocal process among adults, which allows recipients to grow professionally and learn from each other. This type of professional development and these characteristics of adult learning theory align with professional learning communities.

A fundamental purpose of any school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels, and school leadership may address this idea by focusing on adult learning. Schools must shape a collaborative culture in which they work together interdependently and assume collective responsibility for student learning. This collaborative culture cultivates through the efforts of high performing teams that focus on continuous improvement and results.

Descriptions of Professional Learning Communities

An extensive review of literature discovered varying definitions of professional learning communities, but the commonality is a group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students.

The terminology for the professional community comes in many forms, such as a professional learning community, lesson study, communities of practice, collaborative learning teams, and groups (Vangrieken, 2005). Shirley Hord (2004), an expert on school leadership, defines PLC as professionals coming together in a group — a community — to learn. The Northern Central Regional Educational Laboratory defines professional learning communities as "a collegial group of staff who are united in their commitment to student learning, work collaboratively to create shared goals, assess student learning, and improve their teaching practice." The professional learning community encourages constructivism through the working relationships demanded of constructivist learning (Hord, 2004). In her empirical study, she revealed five research-based dimensions of effective professional learning communities:

1. Shared beliefs, values, and a vision of what the school should be;
2. Shared and supportive leadership where power, authority, and decision-making are distributed across the community;
3. Supportive structural conditions, such as time, place, and resources; supportive relational conditions that include respect and caring among the community, with trust as an imperative;
4. Collective learning, intentionally determined, to address student needs and the increased effectiveness of the professionals;
5. Peers sharing their practice to gain feedback, and thus individual and organizational improvement.

Figure 2: Five dimensions of a professional learning community (Hord, 2008).

Richard Dufour mainly emphasizes the importance of collective learning and results-driven collaboration process to achieve the PLC's goals. Richard Dufour (2004) describes professional learning communities as P for a professional who has expertise in a specialized field and who should remain current in his/her knowledge base in the field. The L in PLC is for learning, which is engaged in ongoing study and curiosity that is committed to continuous improvement. The C in PLC is for the community, which is creating an environment that fosters cooperation and collaboration. The premise of PLC is the idea that adults will talk collaboratively about teaching and learning and then take action that will improve student achievement. Professional learning communities are a formal collaborative model embedded during the school day as a regular component of the teacher's work (Cibulka & Nakayam, 2000; Hargreaves, 2003). The teachers need to view PLC work as part of their daily work responsibilities and their pathway to professional growth. Normally, PLC occurs during teachers' planning period, which allows for time to collaboratively discuss student work, teaching practices, curriculum standards, and assessment data analysis.

Peter Senge's (1990) definition of a professional learning community is from the idea of the business community in his book *The Fifth Discipline*, which encourages the notion of implementing learning organizations to improve performance. This idea helps educators to make an alignment with professional learning communities, which describes that any organization must practice the five disciplines of a learning organization to have an effective PLC. The five disciplines are system thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. System thinking is the most critical discipline due to it being the body of knowledge and tools that help an organization see underlying patterns and how to change based on the patterns. Personal mastery discipline is defined as the organization only learning through individuals who learn or people who are committed to their lifelong learning. It comes from the belief that students should not be the only learners in the school, so teachers need to be life-long learners as well. Building a shared vision in a group promotes a shared picture of the future that fosters genuine commitment and enrollment rather than compliance. Team learning discipline occurs through the dialogue and skillful discussion within a group that enters into a genuine process of thinking together.

Focus as it Pertains to School Improvement

The Great Schools Partnership states that professional learning communities are an intentional school improvement strategy designed to reduce professional isolation, foster collaboration, and spread the expertise of individual teachers throughout a school. PLC represents the institutionalization of a focus on continuous improvement in staff performance as well as student learning (Provini, C., 2012). The old factory model of education is no longer prevalent in today's educational system, but the idea of PLC is becoming an effective school reform model. School systems are implementing PLCs to improve student achievement,

teachers' and students' learning, and team collaboration. In Dan Lortie's study (1975), he examined the teaching profession as it relates to teaching culture. His empirical study determines that symbolic interactionism is critical in a social context for teachers to learn, and teachers' capacity to learn is limited by their capability to diagnose problems (Lortie, D., 1975). In terms of school reform efforts to improve instruction and set high accountability for schools, educators may review Lortie's findings to promote a promising school culture that embraces collaboration and trust. Professional learning communities focus on collaboration that can be a fundamental solution that is impacting school culture and increasing teachers' power to improve instructional delivery. Overall, nurturing trust and collaboration within the school culture and focusing on learning for all to meet the needs of school reform acts is the idea of an effective PLC.

Developing Professional Learning Communities

To promote enriched and seamless discussion about student achievement or learning, PLCs must implement norms, agendas, and protocols. These procedures are vital for teachers to participate in such a powerful process for excellence. Each team must have allotted time to meet during the workday and throughout the school year to conduct the collaborative work. Teachers need opportunities and adequate time to share knowledge, discuss learning, and connect new concepts and strategies to their unique contexts to implement PLCs with fidelity (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995).

Teams must focus their efforts on crucial questions related to learning and generate products that reflect learning focus, such as lists of essential outcomes, different kinds of assessments, analyses of student achievement, and strategies for improving results. Teams must adopt student achievement goals linked with school and district goals (Dufour, 2004).

Steve McGee (2016) examined indicators of a professional community that influence science teaching practices in urban neighborhood high schools. In his study, he highlighted that the inquiry cycle is an effective approach to implement protocols for PLCs. The inquiry cycle of teaching and learning must first identify common students and formulate a clear objective to address the problem. This fundamental concept is for the teachers to have a set of common essential standards that they require of all students (Schmoker, M. &Dufour, 2006). The teams need to use the state standards and curriculum framework to help determine what the students need to learn for specific subjects and time frames. Teachers must meet regularly to unpack the standards and truly understand the standards' essential learning to create common lesson plans that focus on thoughtful and explicit instruction for students (Schmoker, M. and Dufour, 2006). Thirdly, the professional learning community frequently analyzes student work and identifies instructional intervention to address any needs of students (Schmoker, M. and Dufour, 2006; McGhee, 2016). After a careful examination of student results, the team collaborates to make instructional decisions based on data to guide, adjust, and implement instruction or interventions tailored to the students' needs (Schmoker, M. and Dufour, 2006; McGhee, 2016). Collectively, the team analyzes data results to determine if the objective was met, then determines whether to repeat the cycle or move to another area of need (McGhee, 2016). Another method to guide the PLC is to focus on standardized achievement data to complete the inquiry cycle and develop questions. The method will support data analysis, so action can be taken based on the findings (McGhee, 2016).

Introduction of Guiding Principles of PLC

Professional learning communities cannot be defined appropriately without discussing the guiding principles necessary to develop an effective learning community of teachers in a

school setting. The three common features for PLC are shared goal or vision for student learning and teaching, teachers' collaborative efforts and activities toward the goal, and supportive conditions and human capacities (Stoll et al. 2006; Vescio et al., 2008).

Dufour (2004) believes the development of an effective professional learning community requires a shared vision, time for collaboration, stable settings for collaboration, and development of teacher leadership capacity. If one principle is missing from a PLC, it shows through the lack of collaboration and collective learning. The key elements of PLC are teachers developing shared goals, having collective responsibility, and having strong leadership that supports and holds the PLC accountable.

Dufour has established three guiding principles required for effective professional learning communities (Dufour, Eaker, & Mattos, 2004):

1. Focus on Learning: accept learning as a fundamental purpose and examine all practices in light of the impact on learning.

2. Focus on Collaborative culture: cultivate a collaborative culture through the development of high performing teams.

3. Focus on Results: constantly analyze and review relevant and timely data to help drive instructional decisions.

Each guiding principle is essential to the effectiveness of PLC and how the learning community adheres to these principles when choosing a critical area of need to focus on improvements of outcomes.

Guiding Principle #1 of PLC: Focus on Teaching and Student Learning

The fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure that all students learn at high levels, and the commitment to the learning of each student is the very essence of a learning community

(Dufour et al., 2016). The purpose of the school is to become effective in supporting all students in the learning process by having teachers be involved in continually learning or professional development. Dufour and Eaker (2007) indicated:

> "The fact that teachers meet together during the day will do nothing to improve student learning. The purpose of collaboration will only be accomplished if teams focus on the right things."

The key to a prosperous collaboration is to discuss the essential learning, which is the priority within professional learning communities. There are four critical questions to help guide and engage participants in PLC discussions:

1. What do we want our students to learn?
2. How will we know they are learning?
3. How will we respond when they don't learn?
4. How will we respond when they do learn?

To promote a collaborative culture within the professional learning communities, the members must focus their dialogue on the four critical questions that lead the work of the community. The first step in ensuring all students learn at high levels is to identify the essential skills and standards the students need to obtain. Team members in the learning community work together to clarify and determine specific learning objectives each student is expected to meet within a time frame or unit of study.

The second step is for the learning community to decide on common assessments to administer to students, which helps to determine if they are making progress or mastering the specific learning objectives. The PLC develops common formative and summative assessments that frequently monitor progress to determine if learning is occurring during the process. It helps

teachers to know which students need additional support and which are making sufficient progress toward the goals. According to Mike Mattos, co-author of *Learning by Doing*, the results of common assessments improve individual practice, build team capacity to achieve goals, and provide opportunities to intervene and extend learning.

Thirdly, monitoring each student's learning on a timely basis provides systematic interventions that ensure students receive additional time and support for learning when they struggle (Dufour, R., 2016). The discussion at PLC will prescribe specific interventions or strategies that will help teachers to respond when students have not learned the intended essential concepts. Time and support are variables that can impact the level of learning of each student, so it is important to constantly keep the focus on learning at the forefront.

Lastly, the PLC also extends learning when students have already mastered the intended outcomes. Timely enrichment and extension of the activity must be provided to the students who have mastered the learning objective, so learning can continue for all learners. Reviewing the guiding questions prepares the professional learning community to discuss and plan for students in all locations on the spectrum to ensure that all students learn at high levels.

Guiding Principle #2 of PLC: Focus on Collaboration

Focusing on a culture of collaboration is the second guiding principle that drives the PLC process. To ensure all students learn at high levels, educators must work collaboratively and take collective responsibility for the success of each student (Dufour et al., 2016). The professional learning community must continue to focus on the four critical questions of the PLC at the work process to improve student outcomes. The cardinal rule in PLC is to attempt to answer the four critical questions by building shared knowledge and learning together. The primary building block and engine that drives the PLC is the expectation and requirement of

working collaboratively in a team. Michael Fullan, the author of *Leading in a Culture of Change* (2001), stated in his book that collaborative cultures, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right things, they may end up being powerfully wrong. In a PLC, collaboration represents a systematic process that allows teachers to work together interdependently to impact their instructional practices in ways that will lead to better results for students (Dufour et al., 2016).

There are major structures that need to be in place with developing professional learning communities to build a culture of collaboration within the school. Collaborative teams need time to meet together regularly to discuss learning, separate from planning time. The reality that schools face today is finding that uninterrupted time for teams to spend adequate time discussing important matters related to learning. It relates to the commitment to all the stakeholders being on the same page to support the initiative.

The collaboration aspect within the PLC can only lead to improved outcomes when teachers are focused on the right work. When teachers focus on the critical area of need and the right work, they are given opportunities to expand their knowledge and teaching toolkit to impact student learning. During PLCs' structure time, teams need to plan, do, study, and act together to become a productive PLC. The very essence of PLC is professionals working together to build and share knowledge to achieve shared goals. Teachers teaching one another the practice of teaching is what will lead schools to continual improvements (Fullan, 2006).

Teams must develop protocols to clarify expectations, set standards by which the team agrees to operate and establish team members' roles to hold each person accountable for the work (Dufour, 2004). Developing norms are one of the most powerful steps a team can take to form a powerful collaboration (Goleman, D., 2006). For team members to share knowledge and

expertise, trust is an integral aspect within the learning community, and agree to norms that govern the team. Teachers must be able to establish a trust to be comfortable with sharing their students' results and reflecting on their instructional delivery and practices. The level of success for the team depends on the teachers' commitment to the team goals, learning, and teaching, which increases the accountability levels among the team members.

Guiding Principle #3 of PLC: Focus on Results

The focus on results is the third guiding principle that influences the development of the PLC process. To focus on results, teams must constantly analyze and review relevant and timely data to help drive instructional decisions. Tim Brown, author of *Creating and Protecting the Shared Foundation of Professional Learning Communities at Work*, stated at a PLC conference that teams must write common assessments, analyze data, develop a plan of action, and assure common feedback. Teams have to establish that data-driven culture to understand the importance of having baseline data of student performance, establishing SMART goals, and monitoring students' progress throughout the process. Tim Brown (2018) recommends charting student results and establishing a data analysis protocol when reviewing data within the PLC. The protocol helps the PLC to have a solid plan of action when working together.

Many researchers also discuss the importance of the continuous improvement cycle to evaluate student data. The constant search for a way to improve student results and to help students learn at high levels leads to a cyclical process in which educators in a PLC follow these steps (Dufour et al., 2016):

- Gather evidence of current levels of student learning
- Develop strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in learning
- Implement those strategies and ideas

- Analyze the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not
- Apply new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

Marzano (2007) conducted an empirical study on effective assessment, and his research concluded four findings. The first finding is that classroom assessment and feedback should provide students with a clear understanding of how they performed and what they can do to improve. Studies have shown when student assessment results are in graphics they have potential gains of 26 percentile points (Marzano, 2007). The second discovery is that feedback from the classroom assessment should encourage the students to improve. The way to communicate feedback to students can have a positive or negative effect on performance. Thirty-three percent of the studies examined how feedback has a negative impact on student learning and academic success (Marzano, 2007). The third finding is that classroom assessments should be formative and inform teachers and students about achievement levels while students are learning. Multiple studies show that when formative assessments are complete with fidelity and done well, student achievement increases by 26 percentile points. The strongest finding is that formative assessments should be frequent and consistent to know the students' most current results. A study concluded if a teacher administers 25 formative assessments, it can result in a gain of 28.5 percentile points (Marzano, 2007).

Using data to guide instruction and make adjustments to teaching based on data can be an effective strategy to improve student achievement and to meet target goals. Professional learning communities must build a culture in which data analysis is crucial to the school, team, and student success. Embracing data analysis protocols to configure instructional plans will improve student outcomes.

In conclusion, there are elements in a professional learning community to make it

effective. Team members work collaboratively and interdependently together to take collective responsibility for the learning process of teachers and students. The level of interdependence among the teams allows the team to achieve common goals that hold everyone accountable for the work. The team cooperating to create a viable list of essential skills that each student needs to know is important to have a common plan. The work of the PLC requires the team to focus on learning to inform and improve the individual and collective practices of all the team members. Dufour (2016) states: "Educators in a PLC focus on results and collaboration which is evidence of student learning."

Principal Leadership in the Development of Professional Learning Communities

It is important to address the leader's role, responsibilities, and beliefs about PLC. The leadership of the school principal is vital for any school improvement initiatives to flourish and be effective. A meta-analysis study conducted by Witziers, Boskers, and Kruger (2003) looked at the relationship between principals' leadership and student achievement across several countries and they concluded no correlation. These findings summarized that there is little to no relationship between leadership quality and student learning. Many studies have proven that Witziers' and colleagues' study does not apply to the United States K-12 school system. Researchers have different conclusions about the relationship between school leadership to student learning. In another meta-analysis study, Marzano et al. (2005) concluded that the principal leadership style has a positive and significant relationship with student learning and achievement. It is worthy to note that the principals' leadership behaviors have an indirect relationship to student achievement due to teachers being the instructors providing direct instruction to students (Dufour, R. & Marzano, R. J, 2011). Teachers' behaviors and actions directly impact student learning, but it's the principal's responsibility to allow opportunities to

build teachers' capacity so they can impact student learning.

It is challenging for school leaders to make an effective change when it comes to working with teachers in isolation, so these school leaders have fostered initiatives to improve teachers' learning and to eliminate teacher isolation. Several comprehensive studies have proven that a culture of professional isolation will not benefit student achievement or outcomes. A study conducted by John Goodland (1984) concluded that teachers who taught in isolation demonstrated a minimal interest in analyzing the subject matter, discussing key findings from lessons taught, which limit efforts for improvement. In a comprehensive study, Lieberman and Rosenholtz (1987) found "Isolation and insulation are expected conditions in too many schools. These conditions do not foster individual teacher growth and school improvement" (p.94). Teacher isolation is a practice that has stood in the way of effective teaching and successful learning for all parties. This structure of teaching and school culture has made it challenging for school leaders to make a significant impact on professional learning for teachers. The PLC process provides a vehicle for focused interactions between principals and teachers (Dufour, R. & Marzano, R. J, 2011).

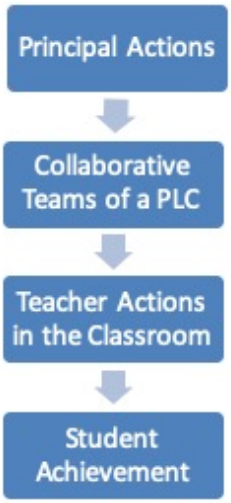

Figure 3: Principals' indirect influence on student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011)

Figure 3 depicts the principals' influence on teachers' actions with a collaborative team approach to learning, which affects student learning (Dufour, R. & Marzano, R. J, 2011). This process allows the principal to have a direct impact on the PLC functionality, and the PLC has a direct influence on learning that occurs in the classroom.

The role of the leader in any organization is to enable people to take on leadership roles and responsibilities. Any good leader knows that the work of creating an effective school cannot be completed alone, so the leader needs to rely on the expertise of others in the organization to improve. These leaders will develop a shared leadership approach and foster instructional team leaders to help facilitate the PLCs. The school leader must promote teacher leaders to help with being change agents and develop others and oneself, which will expand leadership qualities to all stakeholders in the school (Thompson, S. C., Gregg, L., & Niska, J. M., 2004). Adopting an instructional team to facilitate PLCs will help the collaborative teams stay focused on learning and results. To lead this complex change process, the principal must gain the support of teacher leaders and create a guiding coalition named the "leadership team" by the work of Marazano et al., 2005. Typically, 15% of the members in an organization are the "opinion leaders" — people who are knowledgeable, respected, and trustworthy that their position has a major influence on the rest of the group. The opinion leaders should be on the leadership team to move the PLC forward (Dufour et al., 2016).

The leader must have the ability to share authority, facilitate the work of the staff, and have the ability to participate without dominating the conversation within the PLC. This can create a culture that fosters both adult and student learning. The principal mainly needs to exhibit leadership practices that foster a collaborative environment in which teachers work together with a shared vision in PLC to improve student achievement and instructional practices.

In conclusion, PLC, as a school reform effort, has demonstrated some success in student achievement and raises the level of teacher collaboration. Professional learning communities have the potential to be a powerful initiative for continuous improvement in school settings. The work of PLC has helped focus curriculum alignment and increased the probability of sustaining long-term growth in student and adult learning. PLC is one solution that school leaders can implement in their school culture to satisfy the high levels of accountability and to improve student performance. The school leader must develop and foster a collaborative school culture that engages in shared leadership and provide continual support to have effective PLCs in the school setting. Principals make a difference in student learning, and the most powerful strategy for having a positive impact on that learning is to facilitate the learning of the educators who serve those students through the PLC process (Dufour, R. & Marzano, R. J, 2011).

Summary of Literature

The literature about leadership approaches and the development of effective professional learning communities features a great deal of research on the impact of student achievement and high accountability from all stakeholders. The review describes the origin of PLCs within education and understanding that this initiative derived from high accountability measures and a desire to continuously improve school culture and student achievement. School leaders experience a high demand for scrutiny when implementing strategies for an effective school. The responsibility of the principal is a key determining factor in sustaining and evolving school improvement efforts. Summarizing specific leadership styles is the main component of a healthy school culture and an effective learning environment for all within the organization. The literature review makes it clear that specific principal leadership styles have a positive influence on school culture and student achievement. The role of the principal is critical in setting the path

and establishing the main purpose for developing PLCs and holding staff accountable to follow the guiding principles of PLCs. Rosenholtz, the author of *Teachers' Workplace*, provides evidence that suggests low-consensus schools where there are many uncertainties in teaching lead to isolation. The high-consensus schools where teachers problem-solve collaboratively lead to desirable teaching methods. Rosenholtz describes the true bases of the functionality of PLCs occurring in schools with common goals and understanding.

Chapter III

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the function of professional learning communities and the influence of principals' leadership behaviors on the development of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS). The review of the literature has revealed minimal research regarding principals' leadership practices affecting the implementation of professional learning communities. As a result, empirical research has suggested several styles of school leadership that are effective for fostering learning communities, but has not determined one specific leadership style that is most effective. We can think of countless questions about what it takes for a leader to have effective learning communities at his or her school. What is the most effective leadership style to promote a culture of collaboration, focus on learning, and focus on results? What is the school leader's secret skillset to foster professional learning communities? How do school leaders make a difference at their schools by implementing professional learning communities? This study is designed to determine which leadership qualities that a school leader possesses influence the implementation of PLC in Title I or non-Title I school.

Design of the Study

Chapter III presents the research design, research questions, the selection of participants, instrumentation, and the actions in collecting and analyzing data. This chapter will describe the participants and the setting to be studied and the methods used to collect data relevant to the research questions. This phenomenological study will employ qualitative research methods using interviews, observations of PLCs, and document analysis as a means of collecting, analyzing, and triangulating data. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the

phenomenon of principal leadership behaviors that impact the development of professional learning communities in a Title I and non-Title I school by understanding the "lived-experience" of teachers and principals who participate in professional learning communities. This study will endeavor to outline practical applications of principal leadership behaviors deemed significant by participants in the study in developing professional learning communities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guide this qualitative study:

1. How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I schools?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?

Research Design

Qualitative research is a form of collecting data in three different ways: interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is motivated by "how" and "why" questions as a vehicle to understanding a phenomenon (Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S., 2007). This study will use a qualitative phenomenological study design using interviews, observations, and document analysis as a means of collecting, analyzing, and triangulating data. Qualitative research consists of five components: it is naturalistic, descriptive, concerned with process, inductive, and concerned with making meaning (Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S., 2007). To conceptualize the process of developing PLCs, the researcher will have to examine the everyday experiences of the principals and those involved in the professional learning community.

The phenomenological method is the most appropriate approach in detailing the perspective of each principal's leadership behaviors and the perception of their leadership from

their teachers participating in professional learning communities. Additionally, to understand the intricate elements of how the development of PLC impacts under voluntarily or imposed mandates requires a complex multi-methodological approach; thus, the researcher is electing to use a phenomenological and multi-case study approach by utilizing Title I and non-Title I schools in the study (Bogdan, R. & Biklen, S., 2007). A case study is a qualitative research method that searches a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals; the cases involved are bound by time and collected using multiple data gathering methods over a constant period (Creswell, 2009). To understand the phenomenon of leadership behaviors that impact the implementation of PLCs involuntary or imposed adoptions, the case study approach allows an "in-depth" approach and analysis of a secured system (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009).

Setting

This research is in one school district in northern Virginia. The two schools used for this study are in the same state and school district. The school district of the participating schools recently established the initiative to implement professional learning communities in all of the schools within the region. The schools selected to participate in the study are implementing PLCs at their school and consist of different student population demographics. The principals selected for the study assumed the principalship role at the same time during the 2017 school year. When these principals accepted the position at their schools, they moved their schools to implement PLCs practices. For this study, the school district serves School A as a Title I school, and School B is eligible for Title I, but is not serviced as a Title I school within the community.

Table 1

Description of School District and Schools

School District	
Economic Status & Size	Description
Small Urban	The small urban school district has less than 20 schools serving approximately 19,000 students. The schools in the school division consist of 1 Pre-K, 12 elementary schools, 2 K-8 schools, 2 middle schools, and 1 high school. The demographic breakdown for this district: 26.83% Black, 36.08% Hispanic, 28.46% White, 5.32% Asian, 0.17% Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 0.20% Native American and 2.88% Multi-racial and 119 native languages spoken. The four main languages spoken at this district are English, Spanish, Amharic, and Arabic. Based on the demographics, this school district has 35% English language learners and 62% eligible for free and reduced lunch. The school district serves seven elementary schools as Title I. This district has experienced several of their schools labeled as low-performing schools in reading, math, and science based on state assessments. The need to find ways to improve student achievement; this district has a new initiative to implement PLCs at all schools.
School 1	
Economic Status & Size	Description
Urban large	School 1 is currently serviced as a Title I school. The total student population is approximately 700. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 26% African American, 11% Asian, 41% Hispanic, 19% White, 2% Multi-racial, 79% English Language Learners, and 72% Economically Disadvantaged. School A is representative of the school district in that it has a high number of minority students, ELL students, and students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch.
School 2	
Economic Status & Size	Description
Affluent Small	School 2 is eligible for Title I status, but is not being serviced as a Title I school. The median household income is a little over $119,000. This

	school is has a more affluent student demographics. The total student population is approximately 400. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 28% African American, 3% Asian, 8% Hispanic, 56% White, 4% Multi-racial, 30% Economically Disadvantaged, and 9% English Language Learners.

Population/Subjects/Sample Selection

Random purposive and purposive sampling will be used as the most appropriate methods of participant selection because it allows the researcher to understand and gain insight into the study and discover why specific processes are in place (Creswell, 2007). The random purposive sampling method allows for purposively selecting more teachers than needed and randomly selecting from among the larger teacher population. The purposive sampling method will be used to select the principals to understand how and what leadership practices are utilized to develop professional learning communities.

ACPS strategic plan has established a collaborative instructional achievement goal for employees to nurture a school culture in which professionals collaborate closely to share knowledge, skills, and best practices aimed at improving student achievement. The district has implemented PLCs as a district-wide initiative to improve operations across various departments. The district has hired the Learning Forward consulting firm to support the PLC model, provide professional development to staff, provide school site coaching sessions and ongoing support. ACPS district leaders have highly encouraged principals to provide structures at their schools for true fidelity of PLCs, but this initiative has not spread across all schools, especially non-Title I schools.

Serviced Title I schools have been selected as a factor to consider in the data analysis because they are mandated to participate in professional learning communities as a school improvement initiative. Title I schools develop school improvement plans (SIP) that implement

PLCs and continuous improvement cycle. The SIP goals alignment to the school district's improvement plan demonstrates the strategic and thoughtful effort to connect the initiatives. Teachers working at Title I schools are required to participate in collaborative professional learning to address a problem of practice or a professional need. The teachers' sample selections are voluntary participation and the teachers' willingness to participate in the study vary in gender, level of experience, educational level, and school type.

The participants for this study are selected based on the grade level of school they currently work. According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, Public School Teacher Data File collected data from 2011–2012, primary grades' teachers participated in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers more than secondary teachers, and schools located in the city had 84% of the teachers participate in collaborative professional development activities. Typically, schools located in the city have a higher percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch and helps to classify the school as a Title I school. ACPS has selected to service Title I schools with over 60% of students qualifying for Free and Reduced Lunch. The purpose of Title I status is to provide schools additional funding to improve basic programs and create prevention and intervention programs for students who are at risk because of their economically disadvantaged status. ACPS has ten elementary schools eligible to receive Title I services, but they have selected to only service seven elementary schools with the highest Free and Reduced Lunch numbers. As part of ACPS' initiative to implement PLCs, all Title I schools must conduct PLCs at their schools to complete the continuous improvement cycle and incorporate reform efforts to improve student achievement. The researcher wants to investigate the impact of principals' leadership behaviors on the function of PLC in a Title I school and a non-Title I school.

The participants in this study include teachers from KG to 5th-grade elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Virginia. There are twelve KG-5th grade elementary schools, two KG-8th grade schools, seven Title I elementary schools, and seven non-Title I elementary schools within ACPS district in Virginia. There are approximately 800 teachers across all the elementary schools in ACPS. Participants in this study will include two principals (one principal from each school) and six teachers (three teachers from each school). The principals selected for the research study have various leadership styles and years of experience in education. The rationale for choosing these principals is to obtain different perspectives about implementing PLCs. The following criteria purposely and randomly select the teachers for the study: teachers participating in professional learning communities and teachers from elementary school. The rationale for gaining these teachers' perceptions of leadership practices and their teaching practices as it relates to working in collaborative teams is to obtain another perspective of the phenomenon from different viewpoints based on their participation in PLCs.

Gaining Access to Participants

The Principals

The school district Accountability Office will contact the principals to present the IRB approval to research their school. The principal will have to provide voluntary consent before the researcher can collect data. The researcher will have to receive an approval letter from the university IRB board before conducting observations or interviewing participants. The researcher will contact the principals to provide them with a brief synopsis of the study and schedule a time to do the interview. The summary of the study will include an overview of the study, the construct of the research (interview, observations, teacher questionnaire, and document analysis), significance of their participation, the importance for access to the teachers,

and their commitment through the duration of the research. Before the date of the school visit to conduct interview and observations, the researcher will contact the principal as a reminder to ensure the principal is ready to be interviewed, documents are available for review, and a schedule is possible to conduct observations.

The Teachers

The researcher will receive permission from each principal to address the staff during each monthly faculty meeting about the purpose of the study and the significance of voluntary teacher participation. The researcher will provide the teachers with letters of solicitation with reminders about the study. The teachers will be instructed to contact the researcher or complete a participation form if they voluntarily consent to participate. The researcher will email the participants a demographic survey that will be used to select the sample of the population purposefully. Once the researcher receives all the needed participants, she will email the teachers time, date, and location to conduct the interviews. The researcher will inform participants about the collection of consent form with signatures and date at the time of the interview.

Instrumentation

The researcher will utilize a semi-structured interview protocol for the principals and the teachers (attached protocols), the School Professional Staff as Learning Community (SPSLC) questionnaire (Hord, 1997b) will be addressed through the interview questions, PLC observation protocol (Garmston, R., & Wellman, B., 1999), and document analysis. The interview questions for each principal and teachers will consist of open-ended questions that will answer the research questions and understand the phenomenon of the influence of school leadership behaviors on the development of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools.

The SPSLC questionnaire was adapted by Shirley Hord to rate public schools as learning communities in five conditions and evaluate the functioning level of a professional learning community. The purpose of using Hord's (2004a) five dimensions of effective PLCs in this research provided the context for understanding whether or not the dimensions of the professional learning community model were evident and how these schools were similar and different in the level of development of each of these dimensions. These five dimensions (Hord, 2004a) support the understanding of the PLC model and structures that need to be in place within an organizational culture, which focuses on learning, collaboration, and results (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2004). The interview questions will utilize the content from SPSLC to determine how the participants view their learning team's functioning as a PLC in each dimension. A group of educators will be used to review, adjust, and assess the alignment of the interview protocol to the research questions. The PLC observation protocol and document analysis protocol will be developed to align the research findings and to provide a systematic approach to gather data.

Table 2

Alignment of Research Questions and Data Collection

Research Questions	Data Collected
1. How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I?	Semi-structured Interviews, PLC Observations and Document Analysis
2. To what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?	Semi-structured Interviews and Document Analysis

Data Collection

The research study will collect three sources: semi-structured interview protocol, observations of PLCs, and document analysis. Before the interviews and observations, the researcher will meet with the principals and the teachers separately to explain the purpose of the study, the process of the interviews, the purpose of the observations, and the assurance of confidentiality. To ensure validity, accuracy, transparency, the researcher will complete research at one school before moving on to another school (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). Based on this process, the study will make exceptions for participants to conduct interviews and observations if needed for clarity purposes.

Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to elicit answers from questions about a specific topic and the researcher can introduce new issues as a topic of interest emerges in the course of the interview (Edwards, R. & Holland, J., 2013). The interview method is the most important data collection in a qualitative study to understand the lived experiences of the interviewees and the most critical way to understand the studied phenomenon (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007). This qualitative research study will use semi-structured interviews to understand the "how" and "why" of the participants' experiences as it pertains to the functioning level of PLCs based on voluntary or mandated origins and leadership behaviors that influence the development of PLCs. The semi-structured interviews will give the participants an opportunity to share and dig deeper into the "how's" and "why's" of leadership practices that influence the development of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools. The semi-structured interview questions will be used to conduct individual teacher and principal interviews. All research participants will respond to the same interview questions and be provided with opportunities to elaborate if needed. The researcher will ask follow-up or probing questions as needed as stated by Bogdon (2007). The focus of the principals' interviews is to gain insight into

the leadership practices utilized to implement professional learning communities from a Title I school and non-Title I school and to understand which leadership behaviors they mainly exhibited throughout this process. The focus of the teacher interviews is to gain insight into leadership behaviors utilized by the principal to implement professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools and the perception of their team being a professional learning community.

A jury of experts will review, edit, and approve the interview questions. The jury experts will include one principal who is currently working in Title I school and has knowledge about implementing PLCs, one district level administrator who oversees district-wide professional learning opportunities, one teacher leader who facilitates and participates in PLC, and two Seton Hall professors. Based on recommendations from the jury of experts, changes to the interview questions will be made before final approval of the instrumentations. The members of the jury of experts are not participants in the research study.

PLC Observations Protocol

Researchers have stated that there can be a noticeable "observer effect" which is a theory that observed people can change their behaviors because of the presence of an observer. To minimize the observer effect among the teachers, the researcher provided the staff with the observation protocol for their review. The observation protocol will highlight three critical elements of an effective PLC: Shared Vision, Collaboration, and Reflective Dialogue. PLCs focus on student learning which helps to develop a consciousness about norms and values to increase clarity and cohesion within the learning community (Garmston & Wellman, 1999). PLCs focus on developing collaborative cultures by sharing of expertise, learning best practices, and examining students' data to mutually support each other to have effective instruction

(Garmston & Wellman, 1999). Lastly, the PLCs focus on a reflective dialogue allows opportunities to develop self-awareness and collective awareness of practices, learning, and work (Garmston & Wellman, 1999).

The purpose of the PLCs' observation is to capture the functioning level of PLCs and to obtain a snapshot of the implementation of PLCs' guiding principles by observing four PLCs in action. The researcher will triangulate the findings with the interview responses, questionnaire responses, and document analysis conclusions to assess congruency. All observations will use the PLC observation protocol to sustain accuracy, and all field notes will be transcribed within two days to guarantee validity.

Document Analysis

The documents will provide awareness and specifics to the process of change that is not captured during the interviews or observations (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002). The researcher will examine documents such as the PLC agenda template, schedules, school's mission/vision, school improvement plan (SIP), and PLC norms. The principal will provide the majority of the documents that are relevant to the PLC process.

To gain access to the participants, the researcher will have to create a systematic plan to obtain the appropriate data to explain the research phenomenon. The following are the sequential steps in the plan to begin research:

1. Complete ACPS research application and get approval to conduct research.
2. Complete IRB process and provide the district with IRB paperwork. The district will give the principals with the IRB and principals will consent to the research study.
3. Schedule meeting with principals to conduct interviews, explain the purpose of the research study, significance of their participation, the research process (interviews,

observations, and document analysis), and the need to access teachers for the study.

4. Contact the principal before the scheduled meeting to provide a reminder and to ensure they will be available to be interviewed, and documents will be accessible.
5. Permission will be granted to provide teachers with letters of solicitation to participate in the study and the opportunity to address them at a faculty meeting to introduce the purpose of the research and the significance of voluntary teacher participation.
6. When the teachers respond to agreeing to participate in the study, then the researcher will purposefully select the sample population.
7. Schedule a meeting with time, date, and location to interview the teachers. Before the start of the interviews, the researcher will obtain a sign consent form from each participant.
8. After conducting the interviews, the participants will receive a deadline for completion.
9. Schedule observations at each school of three different PLCs that are known to mostly incorporate the five conditions of an effective PLC.
10. Analyze the documents obtained to incorporate coding content into themes so the researcher can find commonalities and similarities to make connections for a deeper understanding of the data.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study will collect a self-administered questionnaire for teachers, semi-structured interviews, PLCs' observations, and document analysis. Data analysis from these sources will help to make meaning of the lived experiences of the participants of the professional learning community, understand leadership practices that influence the development of PLCs, and the impact on the development of PLCs when they are voluntarily adopted or by external

mandates. The process of analyzing data will comprise selecting, consolidating, organizing, coding, converting, and summarizing to make sense of the data.

To quickly identify specific pieces of the data, it is critical to code the data by using a shorthand coding system. The researcher will transcribe the responses from the interviews and code the resulting data into thematic categories. The researcher will use specific leadership behaviors (i.e., instructional leadership, transformational leadership, distributive leadership, and shared responsibility) that are closely aligned to the PLCs' guiding principles (i.e., focus on learning, collaboration, and results) as the coding system. This coding technique identified which leadership behaviors the principal mainly relies on to implement professional learning communities and if the PLC was effective by analyzing the function level of the PLC. The process of analyzing the data into thematic categories allows the researcher to understand the data and make connections within the data.

The following steps describe how the researcher will examine the data to understand the participants' interpretation of the phenomenon and triangulate the gathered interview transcripts, questionnaire results, and documents:

1. Each school and participant will be assigned a code name.
2. Transcribe each interview recordings or observation notes.
3. The researcher will take anecdotal notes about findings from the document analysis, observations, and follow-up questions from the interview. The notes from document analysis will be transcribed to organize and clarify results.
4. The researcher will program into Dedoose, a qualitative analysis computer software, the guiding principles (i.e., focus on learning, collaboration, and results) of a PLC and specific leadership behaviors (i.e., instructional leadership, transformational leadership,

distributive leadership, shared responsibility, model the way, inspire a shared vision, and enable others to act) utilized in this study.

5. The researcher will use Dedoose computer software to code the interview responses, observational notes, and document analysis data sources which will allow the researcher to make sense of the participants' experiences and find trends within the data.
6. All the transcribed interview notes, observational notes, and document analysis' results will be uploaded to Dedoose, and the system will produce highlighted themes based on the codes the researcher set.
7. The researcher will synthesize the data results from the Dedoose system to identify commonalities in practices, trends, and perceptions to understand the findings. During this data analysis process, the researcher will perform a cross-comparison analysis of the data by looking for patterns among the two schools, principals, and teachers.

Ethical Considerations

The requirements for researching Seton Hall University IRB process will be followed. A written approval letter and research application will be completed and submitted to Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) Accountability Department for approval to begin the research study. If the application is approved, the researcher will be permitted to start research at ACPS. All participants in the study will be notified of the voluntary nature of their participation in the study and reminded that all information provided is confidential and anonymous. Also, all participants will be informed that all data will be presented in an aggregated format to protect confidentiality. All participants involved in this study will not have any potential risk associated with their participation in this study.

Chapter IV

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explain the function of professional learning communities and the influence of principals' leadership behaviors on the development of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I elementary school in ACPS. This chapter will display and explore the data collected, report the significant findings, and answer the research questions that support this phenomenological study. The data were collected through observations of PLCs at two grade levels' PLCs at each school, document analysis of each school's school improvement plan, and semi-structured interview aligned to the research questions. The analysis of interview data was conducted through the Dedoose qualitative analysis software program. In total, two elementary school principals and seven teachers were interviewed. The findings are reported in alignment with the guiding research questions:

1. How are PLCs functioning at elementary grade level in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I schools?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?

Description of the Sample

This section offers background information of the school district's journey in implementing PLCs as a district-wide initiative to employ best practices for professionals to learn together. The chapter provides an explanation of PLCs and description of each school's PLC, which will give readers insight into teachers' dynamics when collaborating and engaging in professional learning. Included in this section is a description of the principals interviewed in the study and teachers' perspective of the principal leadership behaviors that influence the

development of PLCs.

School District

For the past two years, the school district has embarked on a district-wide initiative to implement professional learning communities and best practices for coaching. This district has employed a consultant firm, Learning Forward, to provide training to instructional leadership teams (ILT). Each school's instructional leadership includes key stake holders who create and implement the school's overall educational vision, its goals and priorities, and alignment of the vision to accomplish those strategies. An example of members participating in ILT is not limited to the following: administration team, teacher representative from each grade level, teacher representative from each department, and parent volunteer. The Learning Forward training also includes coaching support and extensive instructional resources about development of PLCs and forming coaching cohorts. All school based administrators and teacher leaders attended five days of training about PLC structures delivered by Learning Forward. The Learning Forward consultants provided three days of on-site observations of PLCs with feedback and coaching the ILT at each school. The schools had an opportunity to send an instructional coach or teacher leader to receive extensive training so each school could have an expert in implementing and facilitating PLCs at their school.

Description of the PLC

Professional learning communities are defined as educators committed to working collaboratively in recurring processes of collective inquiry in order to learn and to achieve better results for the students they serve (R. Dufour, 2013). PLC is an infrastructure of the way professionals learn together and solve instructional issues that impact student learning. Teams establish working agreements in how they collaborative and look at the work to have productive

PLCs that focus on the objective. The PLC guiding principles are priorities incorporated to guide the PLC work which are: focus on learning (educator & student), focus on collaborative culture, and focus on results (R. Dufour, 2002; B. Dufour, 2002; R. Eaker, 2007). The four critical questions that drive the work of the PLCs are:

1. What do we want our students to learn and how will they learn it?
2. How will we know if each student has learned it?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn it?
4. How can we extend and enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?

PLCs generate topics by identifying any problem of practice that team detects as a need based on data. The learning continues over a period of time (of the team's choosing), using data to evaluate if practices were successful. There are five conditions that are characteristics of a highly effective team, which are: Shared and Supportive Leadership, Shared Values and Vision, Collective Learning and Application, Shared Personal Practice, and Supportive Conditions (Structures and Relationships) [J. Greer, 2012; S. Hord, 1996]. PLC teams regularly assess themselves using self-reflection surveys and set goals for continuous improvement can determine the team's effectiveness. When student achievement growth is positively impacted by educator growth within their learning community can define the team's success in implementing PLCs' structures. Based on collective learning and application condition, PLCs should meet regularly to collaborate and problem solve at least 1–2 times weekly.

Description of School 1 PLC

School 1 has approximately 78 licensed staff members, and 78% of them hold a postgraduate degree. The researcher interviewed two first grade teachers, one fourth grade

teacher, one instructional coach, and one principal at School 1. The large conference room is where the teams meet twice weekly to conduct PLCs. Walking into the newly renovated conference room at School 1, the researcher observed comfortable corporate seating around a long rectangular conference table and a Smart TV posted at the front and center. The whiteboards covered the walls with colorful markings of strategic planning, schedules, student data, and notes that told the story and mission of the school. The school improvement plan (SIP) was posted on the wall for teams to see as a reference to guide their work and reminder of the school-wide goals. The conference room environment had highlighters, pens, and articles of paper scattered across the table that struck a manner of collaborative work. The business-like appearance of the conference room was atypical of the researcher's experience of Title I schools' attitude toward collaborative teams working to impact learning.

The researcher's observations of the two PLCs at School 1 display some shared practices and unique differences that each team dynamic presented. The level of structure each team given in the PLC agenda was also typical of the researcher's experience in Title I schools. The agenda was emailed to team members 24 hours in advance, and the components of the PLC agenda included objectives, PLC agreements, guiding questions, meeting roles, materials to bring, attendance, meeting topics, desired outcome, facilitator, estimated time, meeting minutes, parking lot issues for ILT, and ILT feedback. All teams established a standard process to share responsibilities at PLCs by creating a document with scheduled roles for all members throughout the school year during PLCs. PLCs develop collaborative cultures by having members share their expertise, learn best practices, and examine students' data. All licensed staff impacting student learning attends PLCs. The licensed staff includes an ELL teacher, a special education teacher, a general education teacher, instructional coaches, and an assistant principal. Through

observations, teams have practiced the ability to respect ideas and opinions of others and come to a consensus on a plan of action based on a complex problem or challenge the team faced. School 1 established a rule of who leads the PLC which is the responsibility of team leads to solicit feedback from the team and arrange the weekly schedules. Leads may reach out to coaches, other team members, central office specialists, and administrators for support with facilitation.

The unique differences in School 1's PLCs are evident through the dynamics of trust and cooperation the team presents during meetings. The differences for School 1 PLC A is the team embeds a reflection question, "What was our professional learning today?" to allow a discussion around members understanding of the learning that took place in the PLC. School 1 PLC A exerts the importance of a reflective dialogue amongst members to recognize opportunities to develop self-awareness and collective awareness of practices, learning, and work. The team's leaders in this PLC dominate the discussion through facilitating a reflective dialogue that increases mutual participation with the other members. The leaders are the driving force of their PLC's functioning at a higher level compared to other PLCs in School 1. School 1 PLC B's adds a unique dynamic to the study as the team's attention on a shared vision and focus on learning. The School 1 PLC B focuses on student learning through analyzing data to increase clarity and cohesion and solving complex issues on instructional practices to meet the needs of the learning community. The team has a shared vision to examine student data regularly and discover new learning opportunities to implement in their instructional practices.

Description of School 2 PLC

School 2 has approximately 39 licensed staff members, and 77% of them hold a postgraduate degree. The researcher interviewed one kindergarten teacher, one third grade teacher, one instructional coach, and one principal at School 2. Part of the school's shared vision

for staff is to teach collaboratively and be involved in continuous staff development.

The visit to School 2 was an eye-opener for the researcher in the sense that the school is not serviced as Title I so the school does not receive federal funding, though the student demographics makes the school eligible. School 2 is a perfect blend of the researcher's past experiences visiting an affluent school and a diversified school. The school appearance is reminiscent of the era of the old schoolhouse. The school mission is to provide a learning environment that promotes love and safety for all students. Resources and technology are abundantly available for the students at School 2.

Since School 2 is smaller in size compared to School 1, the teachers conduct the PLCs in the classrooms one time weekly. Each classroom environment reflected a focus of student-first since every room was organized, and classroom seating was arranged to promote collaboration and different learning styles. The atmosphere of having PLCs in the classroom created a "relaxed" environment with limited tight structures and routines. The teachers brought their laptops to the PLC and circled around the kidney table to be in close proximity of each other. The classroom environment created a comfortable atmosphere for the teachers to easily access instructional materials or student data to bring to the PLCs for discussion. This casual-like setting was not typical of the researcher's experience of staff members doing collaborative work.

The researcher's observations of the two PLCs at School 2 display some standard practices and individual differences that each team dynamic presented. The teams presented a level of systematic routines that the researcher observed in each PLC. The agenda was available for members to access at the time of the PLCs and the components of the PLC agenda included PLC agreements, attendance, and meeting topics. The teams had not established a typical process to share responsibilities at PLCs or standard PLC template to use. The PLCs addressed

student data and learning through analyzing data, creating common formative assessments, and discussing the timeline for progress monitoring. The process helped PLCs' teams to increase clarity and cohesion and solving complex issues on instructional practices to meet the needs of the learning community. The PLCs had a shared vision to examine student data regularly. Teacher B2 said to the researcher that "I think the strength of the teachers is their ability to look and analyze data. We can look at the data, know how to gather the data, and analyze the data." The researcher observed the teams being cooperative versus collaborative by having surface-level discussions about best practices and sharing resources. Team members would offer recommendations of instructional strategies and resources while members agreed and moved forward to the next task on the agenda. The cooperative dynamics within teams can support positive relationships among members that show them having respect and trust.

The individual differences in the PLCs are based on the team's comfortability level with each other, norms established by the team, and commitment to having a shared vision. Teams have established clear norms on how to tackle a problem and derive a consensus. "School 2 PLC C has varied and strong personalities that require discussion time when coming to a consensus on a focus for student learning," stated by Teacher A2. The participants believe the PLC has a shared vision on collaboratively planning the essential learning skills for students and aligning the common formative assessments with the grade-level standards. The members of the team mutually participate and share expertise to support each other's instruction. The team is perceived to function at a high level compared to other PLCs in School 2 because they lean into their differences to address solutions for complex problems.

School 2 PLC's team dynamics add a unique touch to the study through the team's efficiency in the PLC. The team leader began the session by reading the PLC guiding questions

from the agenda, and then, by assuming the role of both PLC facilitator and note-taker, there was unequal participation by members. The researcher observed the team shared what is happening in their classrooms and listened to other ideas being shared to implement in practice. The atmosphere was formal in regards to staying on task with the agenda and not deviating from the agenda. Teacher C2 stated, "Once the task has been met then at our next PLC meeting, we usually touch base one how the task went." School 2 PLC D starts with two reflection questions: What's working? And what are the instructional challenges?

Characteristics of the Principal Sample

This section will outline a description of each principal interviewed in this study. The characteristics described for each principal will provide the reader with an understanding of the principals' leadership practices that support the development of PLCs. The teachers' perspective of their principal's leadership practices will aid in an understanding of how their principal's role impacted the development and implementation of PLCs. In order to ensure confidentiality, the principals and teachers were given pseudonyms. The principals were given code names aligned with their school's Title I status. For example, the principal of Title I school was given the code name "Principal A1"; the 1 represents Title I status and the first school selected in this study. Teachers were also given code names that were aligned to their school's pseudonym number. For example, teachers in School 1were coded as Teacher A1, B1, C1, and D1 to signify these teachers worked at School 1 (Title I school) and worked with Principal A1. All the participants in this study are employees at the elementary school for at least two years so they have experienced the principals' tenure during the implementation journey of PLCs. Two principals and seven teachers agreed to participate in the research study. The principal participants were in elementary schools and both had two years of principalship experience.

Description of Principal A1

Principal A1 is a high-energy and influential leader with a shared leadership approach. The principal's positive and friendly interactions with staff and students show with a daily positive message on the morning announcement, personal connections and conversations with staff, or constant smiles and hugs to students throughout the school day. This leader respectfully sets expectations and allows teachers to make their own decisions with tools provided to make them come to fruition. The teachers hold the principal's words in the highest regard and follow through with Principal A1's expectations and reminds others of the principal's expectations when they are not being followed. Principal A1 presents information, makes resources available, communicates shared expectations, and engages the leadership team in making decisions. The principal engages the ILT in making decisions by including representation from each grade level and department at the school and only makes critical schoolwide decisions after everyone on the ILT has input in that decision. The principal established a distributive leadership approach by extending leadership opportunities for teachers to lead and facilitate their own PLCs with minimal direction from school leadership.

Principal A1 is in early 40s and has been in education for 15 years, six of which in school administration (three years as school improvement coach, one year as an assistant principal, and two years as a principal). This principal has at least six years of strategic planning experience by holding positions such as school improvement coach, Title I Schools coordinator, and data coach consultant. Before Principal A1 became a principal, this leader taught 3rd grade, 4th grade, ESOL (English as a second language), and all subjects for nine years.

Principal A1 states the importance for the leader to be a participant and engaged in learning with the staff, which is an example of a supportive leadership approach. Principal A1

has committed to the principle that a PLC is the way the staff learns new concepts and mainly believes PLC is a vehicle for staff learning needs that will impact student learning. This leader empowered the instructional leadership team (includes a member from each grade level and school department) to receive PLC professional development through Learning Forward consultants to gain a global understanding of the role and importance of the learning that happens in PLCs. Principal A1 shares leadership with assistant principals and supports them to lead and evaluate various grade levels. Each assistant principal supervises three grade levels, which entails completing evaluations for teachers at that grade level and any supervisory tasks that arise for that grade level. Principal A1's administration experience has been with a diverse student population, high-poverty and diverse school populations. Upon assuming principalship, Principal A1 was tasked to improve student achievement and decided to re-develop PLCs as a mechanism for teachers to learn and impact student learning. Over the past two years, School 1's collaborative culture has evolved through spreading shared leadership opportunities to the teachers in facilitating PLCs, making decisions on complex instructional issues, and leading the professional learning work. The teacher leaders participated in PLC training from Learning Forward across five days. These leaders work closely with the consultants to receive coaching three times yearly on practices to facilitate PLCs. PLC leaders receive ongoing coaching from the school instructional coach in leading and facilitating PLCs through monthly meetings and discussions.

Description of Principal B2

The teachers indicated Principal B2 is a visionary and data driven leader who sees the big picture. They believe this leader's "laid back" and "go with the flow" demeanor could appear disconnected from the teachers' reality of the work, but this leader encourages teachers to do

things differently to receive better results. The teachers stated Principal B2's strengths in instructional leadership empowers the teachers to have a laser focus on data analysis and improving specific subgroups' achievement levels. Principal B2 shares a wealth of knowledge about education pedagogy during meetings with the staff and displays understanding of best practices to improve student achievement and engagement. This principal's passion about teachers building relationships with students and having awareness of the students' background demonstrates the principal's understanding of what it takes to truly provide quality education to all students.

Principal B2 is in early 40s and has been in education for 14 years, seven of those years in school administration (one year as a dean, four years as an assistant principal, and two years as a principal). Before Principal B2 became a principal, this leader taught grades 4-8 for seven years.

Principal B2 is described as providing a top tier leadership approach by meeting with the PLC leader, data intervention coach, and the assistant principal weekly to receive updates from the data coach about the PLCs and to provide guidance for the direction of the PLCs' focuses. Principal B2 has committed to receive feedback from stakeholders about the structure that needs to effectively communicate the vision and purpose of PLCs. It is unclear to the researcher who is included in the stakeholder team that provides direction to the vision of PLCs. This leader believes that the principal's role in PLCs is to be the vision facilitator and support the work of the PLCs with a "hands-off" approach. The principal informed the assistant principal that neither of them would attend PLCs to allow teachers to feel comfortable discussing complex instructional issues and teachers to own the PLCs. Principal B2's contribution to the study brings a unique perspective on accountability systems within teachers' learning by encouraging

teachers to be reflective practitioners and aligning actions with shared values. Principal B2 poses reflective questions to the teachers about their instructional practices and relationships between the students to allow teachers to critically think if they can improve in any area of their teaching practices.

Upon assuming principalship, Principal B2 sought out to improve student achievement for a specific sub-group population and decided to develop PLCs as a tool for teachers to progress monitor student achievement and impact student learning. This principal mainly uses PLCs as a vehicle to progress monitor student achievement that will provide information to impact student learning and outcomes. Over the past two years, School 2 has begun collaborating and meeting regularly to conduct PLCs. There is a slow gradual release of the data intervention coach facilitating PLCs to the teacher leads assuming that role. The principal decided that the data intervention coach would facilitate and participate in all PLCs. Principal B2 said to the researcher, "I shape the implementation of the PLCs at the top tier by having weekly meetings with the data intervention coach to inform me of the PLCs. I wanted to do a gradual release of PLC responsibilities because we didn't have any exposure with PLCs before I came. I wanted to make sure that we had an ideal structure so that teachers had ownership of it and it did not take on the image of an admin meeting." The explanation clarifies the principal's role in shaping the PLCs and authorizing the data intervention coach to facilitate and take an engaged position in PLCs.

Data Collection

The themes that materialized came from the observations, interviews, and document analysis. Each theme was assigned from the appropriate corresponding professional learning communities' dimensions from Hord's work. Most researchers intend to understand the

participant's "world" through the translation of interviews into a meaningful account of lived experience (Glesne, 2006). The themes emerged from research question 1 aligns to the five dimensions of a School Professional Staff as Learning Community (Hord, 1997) and the Professional Learning Community rubric (Greer, 2012). The PLC rubric is used to rate the participants' responses to the interview questions. The themes derived from the data collection related to research question 2 displays that principals do not incorporate individual leadership practices as an influence, but utilize multiple leadership qualities. Literature proves that a leadership supporting a more systemic, macro view of leadership in which a leader makes decisions by viewing issues through various lenses, or practices, as different situations often require the leader to combine leadership practices (Bolman & Deal, 2013). In this section, each finding correlates with a theme that emerged from the corresponding research question and analyzed data. The themes are in order of highest to lowest code occurrences as follows:

1. **Supportive Conditions (Structures & Relationships) (111):** Include systems & resources to enable staff to meet and examine practices and student outcomes. Include respect, trust, norms of critical inquiry and improvement, and positive, caring relationships.
2. **Shared Values and Vision (90):** The staff shares visions that have an undeviating focus on student learning and support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.
3. **Shared and Supportive Leadership (85):** The school leader shares power, authority, and decision making while promoting and nurturing leadership.
4. **Collective/Intentional Learning & Application (71):** The staff share information and work collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning conditions.

5. **Shared Personal Practice/Peers Supporting Peers (33):** Peers meet and observe one another to provide feedback on instructional practices that assist in student learning, and to increase human capacity.
6. **Focus on Results:** The school leader leads each team to develop and pursue measurable improvement goals that align to school and district goals for learning (DuFour, 2013).
7. **Focus on Collaboration:** The school leader empowers a systematic process that allows teachers to work together interdependently to impact their instructional practices in ways that will lead to better results for students (Dufour et al., 2016).
8. **Focus on Learning:** The school leader believes learning as a fundamental purpose and examines all practices in light of the impact on learning (Dufour, Eaker, & Mattos, 2004).
9. **Distributive Leadership:** The school leader practices a shared, collective, and extended leadership practice that builds the capacity for change and improvement within teachers' learning and organization (Harris, 2014).

Table 3

Alignment between Research Questions, Themes, and Findings

Research Questions	Findings	Themes
1. How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I schools?	***Finding 1:*** Each principal was invested, including appropriate systems and resources to increase staff and student learning. These supportive conditions promote a culture where staff and students are committed to change of the school.	Supportive Conditions (Structures & Relationships)
	Finding 2: By clearly communicating expectations of the PLC, the principals expressed a shared vision and a set of values align with the school improvement plan and reflect high expectations for student learning.	Shared Values and Vision
	Finding 3: The Title I school's teachers perceived that school principal consistently embeds shared and supportive leadership within the PLCs by administrators sharing power,	Shared and Supportive Leadership

	administration representation at every PLC, and promoting shared decision making.	
	Finding 4: Each principal invests time in implementing PLCs as a vehicle for staff members to collectively learn and determine the specific needs of their team to try new strategies that would improve student learning. The staff meets regularly to collaborate and problem-solve around teaching and learning.	Collective/Intentional Learning & Application
	Finding 5: Some staff work collaboratively to observe and share their practice. The staff has not provided feedback on one another's instructional practices.	Shared Personal Practice/Peers Supporting Peers
2. To what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?	***Finding 6:*** The teachers and principals perceived the principals practicing a shared or distributive leadership approach in developing professional learning communities. Each principal describes their expectations for PLCs as teacher-led and not administrative driven. Each principal had a unique approach in limiting their presence in PLCs to make it the teachers' own meeting space.	Distributive Leadership
	Finding 7: The principals influence school-wide learning by enforcing a book study for the entire staff, but the principals support specific PLCs' learning by ensuring teams receive resources.	Focus on Learning
	Finding 8: The non-Title I school's teachers understand the school-wide focus on frequently progress monitoring of specific subgroups data to address students' deficits.	Collective/Intentional Learning & Application Focus on Results
	Finding 9: The Title I principal's description of leadership practices utilized to develop professional learning communities was congruent with the teachers' perception of their principal's leadership practices.	Focus on Results Focus on Collaboration Focus on Learning
	Finding 10: Supportive leadership is required by principals to implement PLCs of teachers with limited experiences and comfort level of PLCs.	Shared and Supportive Leadership

Findings

The study utilized the phenomenological process to analyze the responses and actions of participants to understand and assess their experiences as related to the study's purpose. This section displays each research question, the findings, and the themes incongruent with the participant's responses from the interviews. Each result will identify the data sources to show the process of data triangulation. This process will help to explore the phenomenon of the influence of principal leadership behaviors on the development of professional learning communities.

Research Question 1: How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City in Title I and non-Title I schools?

Finding 1: Each principal was invested, including appropriate systems and resources to increase staff and student learning. These supportive conditions promoted a culture where staff and students were committed to change of the school.

Themes: Supportive conditions (structures & relationships)

Data Sources: Teacher interviews, principal interviews, PLC observation, and document analysis

Ensuring systems in place and resources available is not an easy task for school principals. However, there is a critical need for supportive conditions that encourage and sustain a collegial atmosphere and collective learning. The American Institutes for Research states that supportive structures include a variety of conditions such as the proximity of staff to one another in meetings, communication systems, and time and space for staff to meet. Developing collegial relationships between the staff as they interact productively toward a goal is the following supportive condition. Through PLCs, teams will build working agreements and norms as they

form a commitment to hold each other accountable while working to achieve a shared vision and goals.

Each principal in this study understood the importance of his or her role in PLCs was to make resources available to the staff whether the resources were for personal or instructional purposes. Each principal contacted the central office as a resource for training, purchased instructional materials to address a deficit, or provided classroom coverage to allow teachers additional planning time. The teachers expressed their gratitude for their principal's hand in making resources available to them.

Teacher B2 articulated, "The resources are the most helpful support from leadership. Whenever we need something, there's never a time that we can't get that. Our principal is very supportive and excellent at connecting us to resources."

The teachers from School 1 explained how their principal maintained the integrity of the PLC by requiring specific structures (e.g., focus on PLC objectives, leadership accessibility, and mandatory attendance of personnel) in place.

> Leadership supports the schedule by making sure we have our ELL and special education teachers in our PLCs. The leadership trusts and lets us write our agendas. (Teacher A1)
>
> The leadership supports by making sure the team focuses on what's important and not the stuff that students won't ever see again. (Teacher D1)
>
> The leadership is supportive because they're right there at our fingertips, at least 90% to 95% of the time. If there are further things we need, then we noted on our agenda that almost everybody in the school has access to view, so that's immediate support. (Teacher C1)

Building relationships within a PLC is essential to the functionality and impact on

learning. Once the teams establish trust, vulnerability, transparency, and accountability, then they can move forward to make the most impact on student outcomes. Merely knowing personal facts about the members on your PLC is not enough to effectively collaborate or create a culture of excellence in teaching and learning. The PLC has a responsibility to be centered on building relationships focused on aligning resources, individuals, and instructional practices to increase student learning (Robinson et al., 2008; Stronge, Richard, & Cantano; 2008). Supportive relationships in PLCs are based on the team's comfort level with each other, norms established by the team, and commitments to having a shared vision. Teachers and principals expressed their perspective on trust and openness exist in the PLC. They described strategies teams employed to develop supportive relationships and best approaches to develop trust within the PLCs by reviewing data, adhering to team norms, and comfort in sharing weaknesses.

My PLC demonstrated trust and openness when we're struggling with something. We're able to go to somebody on our team and ask for an explanation or model a strategy. It takes a lot for a teacher to admit a weakness and express the need for help. (Teacher C1)

The team went back to the data when there was a disagreement. They talked about time and resources available. They had a very healthy debate that was respectful because they honored their norms. It's just a statement of fact and student needs that happens on some of our higher performing PLCs. They're not afraid of having these honest conversations. People know they can have a disagreement and not transfer it to when they see that person in the hallway. (Principal A1)

When people come together, and they're new to the team, then it's tough to be trusted and open. But when you've been together for a long time, and you have developed

> relationships with that person, then you come to learn and trust that person. I think the longer a team is together then the trust and openness comes naturally. The trust and transparency is something that the teams always have to work on. (Teacher D1)
>
> Teachers have been sincere and transparent about their needs with the curriculum. I think the principal was trying to create an atmosphere of trust and openness when not initially going to the PLCs. The teachers are comfortable to tell each other, "I don't know how to do this" or "I don't have time." It's not as easy to say in front of your principal, "I don't know" or "I don't have time." (Teacher B2)

While there was a strong emphasis placed on establishing supportive conditions and structures within a PLC, these conditions support the development of external supports and resources that enable staff to meet as a PLC. Each principal took pride in ensuring responsibility for providing resources and establishing systems to support structures and relationships in PLCs such as set meeting time, meeting norms, celebrations, and protocols to address conflicts. The themes that captured the essence of each observation and interviews were that leadership provided an abundance of resources to support the collaborative work of PLCs.

Finding 2: By clearly communicating expectations of the PLC, the principals delivered a shared vision and a set of values that aligned to the school improvement plan and reflected high expectations for student learning.

Themes: Shared vision and values

Data Sources: Teacher interviews, principal interviews, PLC observation, and document analysis

The principals communicated a shared vision and values about the learning aspect of PLCs and the focus on implementing different strategies for different student outcome. The

researcher's analysis of SIP, PLC agendas, interviews, and PLC observations concluded that School Principal A1 led and communicated expectations in such a like manner. The researcher observed that the principal responses from the interview were the same as the teachers' perspectives of the principal. Principal B2 communicated the focus of accountability in teacher's work, which led to teachers' perceptions as frequent progress monitor students' data and circling back at the next PLC about completion of tasks. The researcher noted the PLC agenda included some primary components: team norms, date, names of participants, topics, and next steps/minutes, which provided a framework for order in the PLC. The first implication of pursuing the implementation of deep professional learning is for leaders to declare the PLC agenda is changing the learning culture of the school (Fullan, 2006). Each principal discussed visions for improvement with the ILT to get a consensus on a shared result. Ideas for improvement were the focus on teaching and learning. Each principal's desire for the PLC was to focus on high-quality instruction for all students. The participants described the PLC vision was a focus on student learning or data analysis processes. Teams may have established protocols to help with meeting at a consensus and making decisions that were aligned to the school or team's vision.

> We as a team progress monitor individual student data with different demographics. We make a goal and plan activities that can boost students' scores. Progress monitoring frequently occurs in our PLC to determine how far a whole class has met common goals. (Teacher A2)

> The teachers utilized the school improvement plan (SIP) to create smart goals. Everything we do through PLCs aligns to the SIP goals. Teachers are not creating their own team goals, but they're picking a goal from our school improvement plan to focus on

for our departmentalized teams. (Teacher B2)

The team decides to have a consensus, when one teacher is dissenting. The team commits to trying something for two weeks and then meet again to bring some evidence to see if it's working or not. Each member has to be able to come to the table and say, 'I did it.' So we've tried to be strategic with our questioning when teachers show reluctancy. (Principal B2)

We do all common assessments across the team. We also make sure that everybody has the same lesson to reach these goals together. We create common smart goals based on the weak areas in the data. The smart goal will be based on that area needing to strengthen. Our action plan aligns to smart goals that we created. (Teacher D1).

The beginning of the year, the team came up with working agreements. There might be the dissenting opinions so we all agree that once the decision is made to embrace, support, and communicate it positively. The decision-making process was seamless because people took themselves out of the equation in terms of ego and instead looked at data needs and the strength of teachers to make the decision. (Principal A1)

Finding 3: The Title I school's teachers perceived that school administration consistently embedded shared and supportive leadership within the PLCs by administrators sharing power, administration representation at every PLC, and promoting shared decision making.

Themes: Shared and Supportive Leadership

Data Sources: Teacher interviews, principal interviews, and document analysis

It is one thing to know you must include stakeholders in the decision-making process, but it is another thing to actually practice that idea. In this case, each principal included the opinions of the Instructional Leadership Team to make decisions about support for the PLCs. The spread

of professional learning communities is about the proliferation of leadership (Fullan, 2006). Each principal took the learning and development of their staff seriously by listening to their needs and providing resources. The participants from School 1 expressed that the leadership provided teachers autonomy to create topics for the learning in the PLCs.

> The principal is trusting of the teacher leaders in the PLC because the teachers have autonomy and authority to decide what would benefit their team in the professional learning community. But groups that are high functioning, we don't get a lot of directives about topics to address. Admin is a part of our PLC but they're not the leaders of my PLC. (Teacher A1)
>
> The teams create their agenda by prioritizing what they're going to discuss, review, analyze, or learn in every meeting. As the principal, I do not go into a PLC and hijack the meeting with my agenda. I reach out to the leads and make the requests. (Principal A1)
>
> The principal said it was up to the team on how they decided to create their plan and what it looks like. If you're going to do it as a team and if you're going to do it individually, but it's entirely up to you. But we had to make sure that the specific criteria were met. (Teacher B1)
>
> The teachers utilized the school improvement plan to create smart goals. There's a representative from each grade level team on our leadership team to develop the schoolwide improvement plan. (Teacher B2)

Finding 4: Each principal was invested in implementing PLCs as a vehicle for staff members to collective learning and determine the specific needs of their team to try new strategies that would improve student learning. The staff met regularly to collaborate and

problem-solve around teaching and learning.

Themes: Collective/Intentional Learning & Application

Data Sources: Teacher interviews, principal interviews, PLC observation, and document analysis

This collegial relationship produces creative and satisfactory solutions to problems, strengthens the bond between principals and teachers, and increases commitment to improvement efforts (Sergiovanni, 1994). Both principals ensured the PLC came together regularly at least once weekly to learn about relevant issues that affected work with their students. In each school, staff learning of some type, such as studying a new curriculum or unpacking standards, were frequently occurring. The Title I school worked with the entire staff to be included in PLCs and provided time to meet and learn together. The leadership shared expectations that specialists such as coaches, EL teacher, and special education teachers should attend PLCs and conducted a schoolwide PLC throughout the school year. The non-Title I school worked with their leadership team, which met weekly to review and discuss schoolwide and PLCs issues. However, few descriptions provided from the interviews of how this staff learning applied to changes in instructional practices. Instead, the data presented the process and content of staff learning that occurred in both schools.

Collective learning exists when professionals can examine professional growth collaboratively, and student learning needs to plan professional education intentionally. The teachers discussed mutual learning in PLCs as sharing ideas and seeking knowledge as a way to apply new learning to their work.

We unpack standards a lot in our PLCs and the Talented and Gifted (TAG) teacher has done mini model lessons. We have done curriculum studies to determine what we need to know

and what's happening in the studies. (Teacher A2)

> I think most of the time we probably spend on unpacking the standards to know how ready we are to teach something. That's reflecting on our current work as opposed to a separate book study topic that could also help our work. (Teacher B2)
>
> It was evident at the same time that the district was investing a lot of time in Learning Forward. So assistant principals, principals, instructional coaches, and data coaches were going through these cohorts that align to the forward learning curriculum, essentials, and structure. (Principal B2)
>
> We shared our top teaching strategy to use for the instructional issue. Then we watched a webinar, looked through books, and searched online to get ideas. We made a comprehensive list of all the different ways that we could teach the content issue explicitly. Once we had a full list, everyone had to pick three strategies that they were going to try in the four-week cycle. (Teacher A1)

The participants' views about staff learning being transferred into instructional practices and the process to assess effectiveness presented more curricula concerns than real accountability. To ensure alternative instructional methods were being implemented and reflected, teams may have used surveys or tools to measure their effectiveness as a PLC. Participants shared how learning transfers into instructional practices and described a formal process that allows time for staff reflection of the type of professional development is needed.

> Your test results will tell us if you did or did not use the strategy that was discussed. We're not going to police you, so it's up to you to do this. So there hasn't been a way to determine if everybody is transferring their learning into instructional practices. (Teacher B1)

> Our instructional coach distributes surveys to all teams three times a year. That becomes data that we reflect on and the teams reflect on their own. We also get an idea of where we are as a staff so that we can move forward with what type of learning or support is necessary for the staff. (Principal A1)
>
> The team's process to self-evaluate effectiveness is very informal. Teams talk through the issue and look at their progress monitoring data to find growth areas. Whatever we've talked about is what we start with as a check-in. (Teacher C2)

Finding 5: Some staff worked collaboratively to observe and share their practice. The staff had not provided feedback on one another's instructional practices.

Themes: Shared Personal Practice/Peers Supporting Peers

Data Sources: Teacher interviews, principal interviews, PLC observation, and document analysis

It is not a secret that colleagues sharing personal practice are the essence of learning in PLCs. Research supports that teacher collaboration for collegial coaching is an influential contributor to professional learning communities. In such interactions, teachers may visit other teachers' classrooms regularly to provide encouragement and feedback on new instructional practices (Leo, T., & D'Ette, C., 2000). As "peers helping peers" (Hord, 1997), teachers build a culture of mutual respect and trustworthiness for both personal and total school improvement. It is a common practice for school staff to informally share successes, frustrations, and solutions with their colleagues instead of formally sharing feedback on each other's teaching. Both schools' teachers recognized that they do not provide feedback on each other's instructional practices to increase human capacity. Supporting peers through observation is an area for improvement, and the staff encourages a recommendation to offer feedback and observe each

other's practices frequently next year.

> Some teachers observe the teaching in that structure and want to be able to collaborate with teachers outside of our school. Our teachers rarely get outside of their building. Now some teachers have observed each other, but as far as a formal structure in place where all teachers are observing each other within the flow of PLCs throughout the year, then it's no. (Principal B2)
>
> So we don't observe each other's teaching, which I think we should. To say and give somebody feedback on what they're doing, even if it's for 10 minutes would be a huge benefit. (Teacher A2)

Even the high functioning PLCs have experienced challenges in sharing classroom practices with the intent to improve their instructional practices. The ideal of supporting colleagues through shared personal practice is the last dimension that PLCs developed in their journeys. Teacher A1 was from a high functioning team, and she echoed this sentiment on peers giving feedback.

> So on my team, we didn't do much of observing and giving each other feedback. People watched to gain confidence or to learn how to do a strategy, but we didn't provide each other with feedback. But that's a good practice.
>
> Teacher B1 expressed the teachers' process in observing each other's practice as a way for learning but not as a way to give feedback for instructional changes to occur.
>
> The teachers had an opportunity to observe each other on an informal basis but not to give feedback. They observed them to see how they were doing it so that they could get some ideas or mimic some of their practices in their room.

Research Question 2: To what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership

behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?

Finding 6: The teachers and principals perceived the principals practicing a shared or distributive leadership approach in developing professional learning communities. Each principal described that their expectations for PLCs as teacher-led and not administrative driven. Both principals had a unique approach in limiting their presence in PLCs to make it the teachers' own meeting space.

Themes: Shared or Distributive Leadership

Data Sources: Teacher interviews, principal interviews, and document analysis

Leadership practices that are shared and distributed with positive influences on school culture pushes schools toward a more collaborative atmosphere where teachers work together to improve teaching practices. It may enhance student learning while using professional learning communities as vehicles to do so. Through professional learning communities, teachers can unite to increase their capacities to enable students to reach higher levels of performance (Murphy & Lick, 2001). Another compelling argument for considering distributed leadership derives from existing theories that concepts of leadership efforts from one person has mostly failed to deliver instructional improvements. The dominant model of leadership, which has been chiefly concerned with the skills, abilities, and capabilities of one person, is severely limited in generating and sustaining school and classroom level change (Fullan, 2001). It seems counterintuitive that schools have not adopted models of leadership that create instructional improvements and raise levels of student outcomes and teacher learning (Elmore, 2000). School leaders are always strategically planning the successful plan of implementing PLCs and obtaining staff buy-in to adopt the initiative. The principals within the study recalled practical

ways in which they developed and implemented PLCs to distribute leadership to the staff to allow teacher ownership of the PLCs.

Principal A1 expressed that PLC is the vehicle for professional learning and the importance to incorporate this initiative at School 1.

> We needed a vehicle to be able to function as a tool for how we learn. The best way to do that for us was PLCs. I didn't make the decision unilaterally. I did propose it, but I consulted mentors, colleagues, peers, others at the central office whom I would need to help support the implementation of PLCs at School 1. They led school-wide PLCs for the staff, and my role as a facilitator was to make sure time was available for the team to learn while practicing the use of PLCs.

Principal B2 presented a view of the importance of PLCs to be led by teachers.

> I pretty much handed off and would meet with our coach who helped facilitate them weekly to inform the PLCs. But as far as a regular physical presence, I urged our assistant principal and myself to be at a distance. We would be off to the side at PLCs and then just more observing so that the teachers owned them. (Principal B2)

Finding 7: The principals influenced school-wide learning by enforcing a book study for the entire staff, but the principals supported specific PLCs' learning by ensuring resources were provided to the teams.

Themes: Focus on Learning

Data Sources: Teacher interviews and principal interviews

The driving force behind PLCs is teamwork around a shared goal and vision for learning. DuFour (2003) recommends a loose-tight strategy, also referred to as "directed autonomy" that provides clear priorities and guidelines while allowing schools the flexibility to chart their paths

to success. School leaders can provide a structure within which constructive discussions can take place that focuses on student and teacher learning. Every PLC can have ongoing dialogues that are geared toward improving the quality of instruction, and teachers are reflecting on thought-provoking questions to address complex issues. The focus of learning in the PLCs will help staff to build shared knowledge and find common ground, which results in a solid foundation for planning team improvement initiatives. Buffum, Mattos, and Weber (2009) declare that it is "educational malpractice" for educators to cling to outdated and ineffective instructional modalities while disregarding research-driven best practices for re-culturing schools. Reflective practitioners and educators have the responsibility within PLCs to timely and interdependently monitor and analyze student data to consistently inform their professional and instructional practices. The teachers from School 1 expressed their principal's influence on the focus of learning through establishing a school-wide book study on "growth mindset." One teacher explicitly outlined the principal's efforts in initiating the book study at the school.

> The staff reading the growth mindset book is an example of when the principal influenced the learning. The principal knew about the book from instructional coach training, bought the book for teachers, and from different teams we were assigned chapters to present to the staff. (Teacher B1)

The teacher A2 and principal B2 from School 2 recalled the impact of their book study, *Good to Great*, on the frequent progress monitoring of specific student groups and the push to intentionally review student outcomes of these subgroups.

> The one thing that the principal influenced staff learning was reading the *Good to Great* book. We have not done a book study in our team PLC, but our school did a schoolwide book study, and each group presented a chapter. The principal gave us a focus to

implement change and how we were learning for that week's PLCs. As we were leading up to the PLCs, we would talk about the contents of the book. It changed what we were learning because that was one of our big focuses. (Teacher A2)

One of my passions is the *Good to Great* book. When I first got here as the principal, people would say we are at a good school, or is it a good school? The more I looked at the data, I saw how our students of color, students with disabilities, economically disadvantaged students, Hispanic students, or English language learners were performing. The more I saw it wasn't a good school. So we had to shift that mindset and use the text. I wanted to take our school from being just a good school to a great school. But to be great, we have to service all kids, not just some. So part of that text was looking at the systems that we had in place and decide what is our focus for our kids as we moved forward within our school improvement plan.

I didn't give the text to them to say, "Everything in this text is right," or "Everything here is what we're going to do." But I gave them the book to challenge their thinking and to see something from a different perspective. (Principal B2)

Finding 8: The non-Title I school's teachers understood the school-wide focus on frequently progress monitoring of specific subgroups data to address students' deficits.

Themes: Focus on Results and Collective/Intentional Learning & Application

Data Sources: Teacher interviews, principal interviews, and document analysis

Some school leaders in some schools have lost focus on purpose for existing in schools, and the main focus of their efforts is to focus on results. Some school leaders tend to get caught in the weeds and not center on the big picture and vision. Educators and school leaders must remember to focus on the right work that will have the most impact on student and teacher

learning. When schools recognize "the fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure all students learn at high levels . . . There must be no ambiguity or hedging regarding this commitment to learning, and schools must align all practices, procedures, and policies in light of that fundamental purpose" (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008, p. 18). School 2 focuses its PLCs on progress monitoring of student data to examine their instructional practices. Teachers and principal express how their PLCs focus on results as a big push for this school year.

> The PLC is much focused right now on progress monitoring. I think that's a huge push in our PLCs to focus on results. The most significant push is, "Are you progress monitoring," "Is your progress monitoring updated?" "Do you have the data to show it?" (Teacher A2)
>
> Data is something that our principal cares a lot about, especially for our at-risk students. Our gap group students can be focused on to a detriment because there are students who don't necessarily fall into that gap group who need attention. It would be nice if the teams could sit down and decide who they are going to progress monitor based on test scores and the data. (Teacher C2)
>
> I think one of the leadership behaviors that the principal has exhibited that's positive is encouraging teachers to be risk-takers when looking at student data. The principal always says take a risk and if it doesn't work, we can examine that, too, but we won't know unless you take a chance. The principal encourages everybody to do things differently to get different results. (Teacher B2)
>
> I expect that teachers own and are reflecting on their practice, and are sharing ideas about what is working with their own instruction with targeted groups of students. Their colleagues can benefit from sharing and then putting into action those resources,

interventions, and practices to see if it's working. The teachers can think about a cyclical process and continuously reflect. (Principal B2)

Finding 9: The Title I principal's description of leadership practices utilized to develop professional learning communities was congruent with the teachers' perception of their principal's leadership practices.

Themes: Focus on Results, Focus on Collaboration and Focus on Learning

Data Sources: Teacher interviews and principal interviews

School Principal A1 led and harmoniously communicated expectations, with what the teachers stated as their perceptions of their principal, and with what the researcher observed. The principal and staff explained the commitment the principal had about implementing PLCs and the importance of setting explicit beliefs to create a solid foundation for the guiding principles. The teachers expressed the principal's role in the PLC as setting expectations and practicing shared leadership approach in implementing PLCs.

> The principal had a significant role in the implementation of PLCs and made it look like the principal's role was not as important. The principal didn't want the principal's voice to become the team's voice. The principal provided leadership through other people in the school by sending the literacy coach to a team that was struggling in literacy instruction or sending a math coach to a team struggling in math. I think that also the principal had a significant role in strengthening the leadership of the team and leaders of the PLCs through Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) and other leadership opportunities. (Teacher A1)

> I think that with the principal being new, the leader set the foundation and the expectations of what was going to happen in PLCs. I believe that the principal sends out

the message and vision, and then it trickles down to everyone else. So it gives them that foundation or the expectation. (Teacher C1)

The principal set the message that we were going to be a professional learning community as a school, and we were going to be a professional learning community by teams. The principal provided information on what a professional learning community is, provided training on what a professional learning community is, and what professional learning communities should address. (Teacher B1)

I initially presented the concept of PLCs, and it differs from the grade-level meetings that we were having or that the school had in the past. I shared from experience what it was like to be a learner and a participant on a PLC. I was participating in learning with them. I wanted them to understand this was something we were going to do together and that I knew how to function as a part of the group without having to be the leader or dictator. For over a year, my mantra was to collaborate, take risks, collaborate, and take risks.

So in terms of time, we made sure that the master schedule had opportunities for everybody on the team to collaborate. People need to talk to the people they work with at schools. They need to engage in learning together; otherwise, it becomes a disjointed experience for students. We have learned many things as a staff in a short two years. What we have not done is abandon PLCs. It is the way that we learn new things. (Principal A1)

Finding 10: Supportive leadership is required by principals to implement PLCs of teachers with limited experiences and comfort level of PLCs.

Themes: Shared and Supportive Leadership

Data Sources: Teacher interviews, principal interviews, and document analysis

In some cases, teachers who lack expertise in facilitating PLCs or limited teaching experience may need additional support from leadership in facilitating effective PLCs. Research supports to have effective PLCs the leaders must guide the PLC toward self-governance. School leaders may take the lead in arranging and facilitating PLCs first hand, but as time progresses, then PLC members should be urged to take prominent roles in leading. The gradual release of responsibilities will allow teachers to take the lead and have a sense of shared decision making and authority. Teachers obtaining self-governance in facilitating PLCs will benefit their self-confidence of professionalism and PLCs. The teachers from the study explained supportive leadership is required to aid some PLCs who need administrative support in decision making and shared authority.

> Our administrator gives us a lot of autonomy and authority within the PLC. We create those norms together, so that helps with sharing power and decision making. The principal allows us to make the PLC what we need it to be, which is helpful but at the same time, I think the PLC might need more guidance in different areas. The meetings sometimes turn into chit-chatting, which is not what it is supposed to be. (Teacher A2)
>
> So I think leadership has been supportive in a hands-off way. The PLCs must meet two days weekly and then from there, and it is up to the teams to decide what they want to focus on and how long they want to focus on it. I think the teams that are struggling may need leadership to step in and guide those teams a little bit more to get them to where they need to get them going. Either they're struggling because there are dominant personalities just overriding everybody in the PLC or the ones who are not so dominant vocally tend to resist the process. (Teacher B1)

Summary

This chapter has presented the findings for the principal and teacher structured interviews, PLC observations, and document analysis. The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of leadership practices on the development of professional learning communities at Title I and non-Title I schools in a school district in Northern Virginia. This chapter has attempted to answer the following research questions which guided the path of this study.

1. How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I schools?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?

Ten findings resulted from the analysis of the interviews, PLC observations, and school documents analysis. The findings highlighted nine themes presented in the development of professional learning communities and the influence of principals' leadership on each of the themes. The top five PLC conditions at the Title I school employed by the principal or perceived to be used by the teachers in order of highest application were as follows:

1. Shared and Supportive Leadership (21): The school leader shares power, authority, and decision making while promoting and nurturing leadership.

2. Shared Values and Vision (19): The staff shares visions that have an undeviating focus on student learning and support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.

3. Collective/Intentional Learning & Application (19): The staff shares information and works collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning conditions.

4. Shared and Distributive Leadership: The school leader practices a shared, collective, and extended leadership practice that builds the capacity for change and improvement within

teachers' learning and organization (Harris, 2014).

5. Focus on Collaboration: The school leader empowers a systematic process that allows teachers to work together interdependently to impact their instructional practices in ways that will lead to better results for students (Dufour et al., 2016).

The top five PLC conditions at the non-Title I school employed by the principal or perceived to be employed by the teachers in order of highest application were as follows:

1. Shared Values and Vision (17): The staff shares visions that have an undeviating focus on student learning and support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.

2. Collective/Intentional Learning & Application (7): The staff shares information and works collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and improve learning conditions.

3. Shared and Supportive Leadership (7): The school leader shares power, authority, and decision making while promoting and nurturing leadership.

4. Focus on Results: The school leader leads each team to develop and pursue measurable improvement goals that are aligned with school and district goals for learning (DuFour, 2013).

5. Shared and Distributive Leadership: The school leader practices a shared, collective, and extended leadership practice that builds the capacity for change and improvement within teachers' learning and organization (Harris, 2014).

While there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach to developing professional learning communities, the study findings align with current literature shows that one of the principal's roles is establishing the vision and goals for teachers learning together. Overall, utilization of distributive leadership practices relied heavily upon each principal and the focus of PLCs as a vehicle for teachers to learn from each other and solve complex instructional issues.

Chapter V

Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the influence of the principal's leadership practices on the development of professional learning communities. The research study used qualitative and phenomenological methodology by analyzing results from interviews, observations, and documents. This study adds to the body of research by conceptualizing the implementation of PLCs at a Title I school and non-Title I school in Alexandria City Public Schools. The study outlines the leadership practices utilized in implementing PLCs, the challenges encountered through the development of PLCs, and the protocols used to support teachers' collaboration in PLCs. The study sought to uncover principal leadership practices and structural conditions that positively affect the development of professional learning communities.

Prior research indicated that PLCs are the vehicles that promote learning and collaboration among teachers and administrators (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1995). Also, other researchers determined that a culture of learning provides opportunities for collaboration (Dufour, 1995; Leithwood, 1990; NAESP, 2001). Researchers agreed that the leader is the key to the success of an organization that promotes learning and collaboration (NAESP, 2001; Senge, 1990; Sparks, 2002). The review of research indicates that effective principals create supportive conditions and structures for learning that enable continuous improvement of performance for adults in PLCs but students as well. These effective leaders provide opportunities for staff to participate in PLCs that are necessary to develop innovative approaches to education and extend instructional practices.

This research contributes to the body of literature relating to the work of PLCs' implementation process by chronicling the experiences of two schools in both a Title I and non-

Title I context. The results from the study focused on the five dimensions of a PLC as identified by Hord (1997a; 2004) (a) supportive and shared leadership, (b) shared vision and values, (c) collective learning and application, (d) shared personal practice, and (e) supportive conditions. Also, the findings from the study highlighted the three guiding principles of a PLC as identified by Dufour (2010; 2013) (a) focus on results, (b) focus on teaching and student learning, and (c) focus on collaboration. This concluding chapter will (1) present the findings aligned to the research questions that guided the study, (2) discuss recommendations for policy, school districts, and practitioners, (3) offer suggestions for future research, and (4) articulate concluding remarks to finalize the scope of this study.

Restatement of Problem

Literature related to the study of principal leadership and its role in leading professional learning communities can require thorough changes to school culture and operations. Every action in the school must support learning and increasing student outcomes. It is believed that PLCs will be a vehicle for systemic change in the area of education (DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Hord, 1997a, 1997b, 2004). The participants of the study have the ability to implement, maintain, and sustain the new phenomenon of collaboration and learning together. Research shows that the principal has the power to influence PLCs by developing structures and providing supportive conditions to help teachers collaborate, learn, and try new ideas. Principals who want to embrace the PLC process must go beyond being managers and policy implementers to create a collaborative environment for teachers and promote a culture of continuous learning for both teachers and students. My study will help fill the gap in the literature on how the school leaders' behaviors influence PLCs in the school.

Research Questions

This phenomenological study examined how elementary principals influence the implementation of professional learning communities through specific leadership practices. Also, the research studied how professional learning communities function at a Title I and non-Title I school. The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I schools?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study has explored the phenomenon of principal leadership behaviors that affect the implementation of PLCs and to understand the function of PLCs in a voluntary and in a required context. The research study has outlined principal leadership practices and structural conditions that positively affect the development of professional learning communities. The study has explained the practical applications of implementing PLCs' dimensions in the school learning structure deemed by participants in the study to be significant in the development and sustainability of PLCs. The outline would provide educational leaders with an understanding of the principals' practices needed to engage in the developing PLCs and knowing conditions to put in place to have effectively functioning PLCs.

Review of Methodology

This phenomenological study used qualitative research methods, including interviews, observations of PLCs, and document analysis to collect data and analyze findings. The interview transcripts were analyzed by following the Moustakas (1994) method for synthesizing data.

First, I reviewed the data from each of the participant's interview transcripts and highlighted significant statements that were relevant to the experience and research questions. Second, I clustered the meaning units into themes based on Hord's (1997a; 2004) five dimensions of PLCs and Dufour's (2010; 2013) three guiding principles of PLCs. Third, I developed a composite textural-structural description of what and how the participants experienced the phenomenon. Fourth, I reflected on personal experiences with implementing PLCs and working in Title I and non-Title schools and recognizing my own biases and prejudgments by stating my experience in summary. Finally, I constructed a universal meaning of the experience, which highlighted the common themes regarding how principals practice distributive leadership in implementing PLCs. Leaders need to establish structural conditions for effective PLCs. The Dedoose qualitative analysis software assisted the researcher in identifying trends and code co-occurrences within the data.

The research study interviewed two elementary school principals and seven teachers (four participants from a non-Title I school, and five participants from a Title I school). The principal interviews were to gain insight into their perception of how they influence the development of PLCs. The researcher also wanted to understand the principals' opinions on how PLCs function at their schools. The teacher interviews focused on their perceptions of leadership behaviors utilized by the principal that influence the guiding principles of PLCs and how their team's PLC functions at their school. The purpose of the PLC observations was to capture the critical elements of PLC (a) Shared vision and focus on learning, (b) Collaboration, and (c) Reflective dialogue. By conducting the PLC observations, the researcher obtained a multi-layered snapshot of how Title I and non-Title I schools implement PLCs. Lastly, the document analysis provided the researcher insight and detail into the implementation process of PLCs at

each school that could not have been captured during the interviews or observations (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007; Patton, 2002).

Limitations

This study outlined the leadership practices employed by elementary principals that implement PLCs at their schools to understand how PLCs function in a Title I school versus a non-Title I school. This study was limited because the principal participants had only two years of being a principal, and teacher participants were all females. The research was limited to the two different distributive leadership practices the principals presented, such as one principal demonstrating a more hands-off approach and the other principal exhibiting a more participatory approach to the implementation of PLCs at their schools. Also, the two schools identified represented one Title I school and one non-Title I school, and only two out of fourteen elementary schools within the district participated in the study. The findings of this study will be challenging to generalize because of the small sample size participating in the study.

Discussion

This section presented a summary of the findings and conclusions based on the analysis of the data related to the research questions. This section also highlighted the significance of the results. The themes were discussed to address applicability and practitioner application in leadership practices. The study identified ten significant findings and nine overarching themes.

Conclusions for Research Question 1

My first research question was how PLCs were functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I schools. To examine this question, I used interview transcripts, PLC observations, and document analysis. The findings from this study suggest a strong presence of three of the five professional learning community dimensions.

The dimensions with the highest occurrence in PLCs are supportive conditions, shared values, and vision, and shared and supportive leadership. The data represents the PLCs establishing the foundational dimensions first before moving to the most complex dimensions (Collective learning and Shared personal practice) on the continuum of PLC development. When a PLC functioned at high levels, the team shifted their focus from teaching to learning and began to intentionally reflect on their practice.

Dimension 5 (Supportive conditions [structures] & relationships) received the highest rating (111) of implementing or institutionalizing this dimension within their PLCs. It was followed by Dimension 2 (Shared values and vision) rated at (90) as a dimension applied within PLCs. Dimension 1 (Shared and supportive leadership) measured at (85) slightly trailing behind Dimension 2. Next, Dimension 3 (Collective/intentional learning and application) rated at (71) as a dimension PLCs were starting to initiate or implement fully. Lastly, Dimension 4 (Shared personal practice/peers supporting peers) rated at (33) as a dimension that was not initiated or starting to begin in PLCs. Shared personal practice/peers supporting peers was an area of focus for both schools, and teachers' reflective practices to increase capacity was lacking in the PLCs.

Finding 1: Each principal was invested, including appropriate systems and resources to increase staff and student learning. These supportive conditions promoted a culture where staff and students are committed to change of the school.

The principals in this study demonstrated an investment in creating supportive conditions (structures) and relationships in their schools. These principals enabled staff to meet at least once weekly to examine instructional practices and student outcomes. Based on the functionality level and staff comfort in the PLC, some PLCs established trust and positive relationships when discussing complex issues. Both schools' PLCs were in the implementation stage of supportive

conditions and relationships because, in most cases, systems are appropriate to increase staff and student learning. In this setting, most staff are committed to promoting a caring, respectful, and trusting team relationship. Addressing improvement in educational outcomes is emotional and hard work because the issues are complex and challenging. It is essential to have supportive structures in PLC when discussing complex issues and allow teams to decide on working agreements. The norms allow teachers to have equal participation in the work and to lean into the work with joy and respect.

Finding 2: By clearly communicating expectations of the PLC, the principals delivered a shared vision and a set of values that aligns with the school improvement plan and reflects high expectations for student learning.

The PLCs at both schools implemented or embedded in their practices the shared vision and values dimension. The PLCs shared a vision and set of values that exist across the school concerning student learning. Each school's PLCs focuses aligned with the school-wide improvement plan goals. The PLCs' efforts aligned to the SIP goals and initiatives. The non-Title I school's PLCs were in the implementation stage of shared vision and values. The Title I school PLCs were teetering between implementation and institutionalized stage for this dimension. Hord (1997) defines Shared Values and Vision as the condition where school staff share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning. Finding 3 and Finding 10 share the same theme so they are listed below in the discussion section to show the connection.

Finding 3: The Title I school's teachers perceived that school administration consistently embedded shared and supportive leadership within the PLCs by administrators sharing power, participating at PLCs, and promoting shared decision making.

Finding 10: Supportive leadership is required by principals to implement PLCs of teachers with limited experiences and comfortability of PLCs.

Shared supportive leadership dimension was ranked the third highest that the participants believe their PLC implemented. Dimension 1 points to supportive school conditions in which the school administrator demonstrates a willingness to participate democratically with teachers, sharing power, authority, and decision making. In some cases, the non-Title I school PLCs were at the initiation stage for shared and supportive leadership. Pockets of leadership existed beyond the school administrators, but shared leadership was not prevalent across the school. The Title I school PLCs were in the implementation stage for having shared and supportive leadership because staff shares power, authority, and responsibility when making decisions around teaching and learning.

Finding 4: Each principal invested in implementing PLCs as a vehicle for collective learning and determining specific needs of their team to try new strategies to improve student learning. The staff met regularly to collaborate and problem-solve around teaching and learning.

Dimension 3 Collective learning and application is defined as a staff collective learning and application of the learning (taking action) to create significant intellectual learning tasks and solutions to address student needs (Hord, 1997). Collective learning and application was the next-to-last dimension implemented within PLCs because of the complexity of the process to collaborate and solve problems together. The Collective learning and application dimension was being implemented and moving toward a standardized practice with the Title I school PLCs, whereas the collective learning and application dimension was being initiated at the non-Title I school. The Collective learning and application dimension is an area that PLCs practice when they are high functioning and later in the development stages of PLC implementation. The

practice of collective learning takes consistent exercising when determining the problem of practice within the PLC. Collective learning and application can be explained through adult learning theory and the association with PLCs. Knowles (1980) defines andragogy as, "The art of and science of helping adults learn" (pg. 46), which helps to describe adult learning theory. He discusses the importance of a supportive and comfortable psychological climate as it relates to adult learning. An environment should be established to make adults feel supported, respected, and accepted. His description of a healthy psychological climate to help adult learning is similar to a healthy school climate nurtured through shared and supportive leadership.

Finding 5: Some staff worked collaboratively to observe and share their practice. The staff had not provided feedback on one another's instructional practices.

The one PLC dimension reported to have a weak presence was shared personal practice/peers supporting peers. This dimension is defined by peers meeting and observing one another to provide feedback on instructional practices, to assist in student learning, and to increase human capacity (Hord, 1997). Progress has been made in recent years to develop a collaborative culture among teachers but it appears that teachers still work in isolation and have little interaction with one another. While the presence of professional learning communities promotes collaborative cultures, participants in this study suggested that shared personal practice through observations and feedback was missing within the PLC structure. Possible explanations for this outcome may be associated with the lack of school resources to help facilitate a peer observation initiative, a potential deficit in teachers' understanding of how to engage in peer observation and peer feedback, or an underdeveloped school culture in the area of collaboration and trust.

Conclusions for Research Question 2

My second research question is to what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools. To examine this question, I used interview transcripts and document analysis. The findings of this study suggested that Title I school principals employed mostly shared and supportive leadership dimensions to implement PLCs, which promoted shared leadership qualities. The findings also suggested that the non-Title I school principal employed mostly the shared values and vision dimension by reiterating the importance of progress monitoring student data and focus on student learning. Education leadership is possibly the most important single determinant of an effective learning environment (Kelley, R. C., Thornton, B., & Daugherty, R., 2005). Furthermore, the notion that the principal influences culture in a school environment can play a role in the collaborative learning amongst teachers and have the greatest opportunity to succeed when the principal articulates the learning goals.

Finding 6: The teachers and principals perceived the principals practicing a shared or distributive leadership approach in developing professional learning communities. Both principals described that their expectations for PLCs as teacher-led and not administrative driven. The principals had unique approaches in limiting their presence in PLCs to make them the teachers' own meeting space.

The school principals practiced distributive leadership qualities in developing professional learning communities at their schools. Distributed leadership practices ensure to positively impact collegial relationships, teacher collaboration, and school culture. When principals demonstrate distributive leadership it helps teachers to contribute to collaborative opportunities and believe that their meaningful contributions matter. Leadership is not merely a

function of the school principal; instead, it is about the activities engaged by leaders, in interaction with others around specific tasks (Spillane et al., 1999). The principal must develop the leadership capacity of the staff to help assist the implementation of school improvement initiatives, specifically professional learning communities. There are many benefits to distributed leadership when teachers provide appropriate resources to share leadership roles and are allowed time within the school day for teachers to collaborate. When principals include teachers in the decision-making process and embrace their ideas, teachers have a substantial investment in the school's mission and goals. When the principals practice distributive leadership they should listen, clarify, and tap into the expertise of teachers. (Peter Senge).

Finding 7: The principals influenced school-wide learning by enforcing a book study for the entire staff, but the principals supported specific PLCs' education by ensuring teams received resources.

The very essence of a professional learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010, p. 23). The idea of focus on learning instead of teaching will ensure that every student reaches his or her highest potential. DuFour and Marzano (2011) noted that schools do not need instructional leaders; they need "learning leaders" who actively participate in the collaborative process with teachers and other pertinent staff. It's crucial to have the building leader involved because without the leader, the PLC will not sustain. The teachers and principals accept learning as a fundamental purpose in the PLCs and examine all practices in light of the impact on learning.

Finding 8: The non-Title I school's teachers understood the school-wide focus on frequently progress monitoring of specific subgroups data to address students' deficits.

When teams are focused on results, they are committed to achieving desired results. The

teams at the non-Title I School were hungry for evidence to support that their efforts were producing the intended outcomes. These PLCs frequently and consistently focused on progress monitoring of student achievement to make changes and decisions in their instructional practices. The principal's strong emphasis on results did push the PLCs to make their topics focus on student achievement. Research consistently shows that regular, high-quality formative assessments increase student achievement (Black & William, 1998). Tim Brown (2018) recommends charting student results, and establishing a data analysis protocol when reviewing data within the PLC helps the PLC to have a solid plan of action when working together. Both schools consistently discussed a plan or practiced improvement cycles to review student data weekly. The constant search for a way to improve student results and to help students learn at high levels leads to a cyclical process in which educators in a PLC follow these steps (Dufour et al., 2016).

Finding 9*:* The Title I principal's description of leadership practices utilized to develop professional learning communities was congruent with the teachers' perception of their principal's leadership practices.

Focus on collaboration is "a systematic process in which [we] work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact . . . professional practice to improve individual and collective results" (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Many, 2010, p. 120). Researchers (Strahan, 2004 and Richardson, 1998) agree that the school-wide implementation of PLCs also provides opportunities for embedded professional development within the school culture. These opportunities allow the teachers to develop professional relationships with each other and work collaboratively on learning curricula and students' developmental levels to provide high-quality education. Based on the findings, the teachers believe that the leader sets the vision that

collaboration is an expectation, and teachers' learning will occur in PLCs.

Recommendations for Policy

As federal and state regulations demand more accountability, many schools are continually seeking ways to meet the guidelines and school reform initiatives. The principal's role in leading the school is critical for any school improvement to happen within all aspects of the school culture or environment (Edmonds, 1979; Leithwood, 2005; Hord, 1997; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). According to Edmonds (1979), one main factor among effective schools is strong leadership from the principal who influences setting the tone for positive school culture, selecting the most appropriate instructional strategies, and finding school resources.

This study examined the influence of principal leadership behaviors on the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools. The development of PLC offers one solution to address the high accountability pressures in teachers' professional development. PLC is a learner (teacher) driven approach to embed professional development in a meaningful way for educators, and the structure builds community amongst the teachers to increase learning for all. The study findings demonstrate that where there were established or successful PLCs at a school, the school principal exhibited qualities of distributed or shared leadership. The researcher makes the following recommendations for policy:

Recommendations for School District

1) The school district should provide differentiated professional development that advances the professional capacity of principals based on the following five dimensions of practical ways to implement professional learning community: a) Shared and Supportive Leadership, b) Shared Values and Vision, c) Collective/Intentional Learning and Application, d) Shared Personal Practice, e) Supportive Conditions & Structures. The

training will ensure that the principal incorporate all five dimensions when developing professional learning communities and not put more considerable effort into one or a few aspects.

2) The school district should embed professional development opportunities within the learning of the PLC. Professional development occurring within PLCs could be the main avenue in providing learning opportunities for teachers. If the PLC focuses on learning, the staff becomes accustomed to meeting regularly to learn about various topics that will improve their quality of education and impact student learning. Each member of the PLC must participate in multiple collective learning opportunities to help them grow personally and professionally.
3) School district policies should create time for teachers to engage in frequent peer observations that allow peers to provide feedback on each other's instructional practices. Peer observations should be incorporated into the school district's professional learning plan or program for teachers. Through the learning of PLCs, teachers should have opportunities to provide constructive criticism and feedback and opportunities to observe each other. The school district can offer incentive-based programs to schools that engage in practices that foster peer feedback programs.
4) The school district should provide professional development for PLC facilitators or leaders to advance their professional capacity on implementing the three PLC guiding principles in all meetings: a) Focus on Learning, b) Focus on Collaboration, and c) Focus on Results. Dufour has established three guiding principles required for effective professional learning communities (Dufour, Eaker, & Mattos, 2004). If one holds this statement to be accurate, it is incumbent upon PLC facilitators and leaders to address

these guiding principles in every PLC meeting. The professionals in the PLC must review the guiding questions that drive the work of the PLCs and unpack learning objectives: a) What do we want our students to learn? b) How will we know they are learning? c) How will we respond when they don't learn? d) How will we respond when they do learn? The leader can ensure that PLC's topics are related to the PLC essential functions which are: a) Identify Essential Learning, b) Explore Instruction, c) Commonly Assess, and d) Respond to Learning.

Recommendations for Practitioners

5) Principals should carefully consider how distributed leadership practices are developed, assessed, and sustained over time. Principals leverage the use of distributed leadership practices to positively influence actions related to inviting individuals to share areas of expertise; celebrating the accomplishments of faculty; providing resources and opportunities for teachers to participate in shared leadership, and trusting teachers to make school-wide decisions. Leithwood (1998) concluded that administration distributed to the teachers has a direct impact on student learning than that of the principal because teachers are directly involved in student outcomes. The principal must develop the leadership capacity of the staff to help assist the implementation of school improvement initiatives, specifically professional learning communities.
6) The principal must participate in the professional learning community to develop and implement it. The PLC needs strong leadership supporting the priority for it to flourish. The building principal becomes an active participant with the teachers throughout the process. The best accomplishment by the principal is setting time aside to attend PLC meetings throughout the school year. It would behoove the principal to establish trust

between administrators and teachers, so there is a safe environment to freely discuss issues and make mistakes free of judgment. Teachers and principals must commit to being a part of PLCs and the idea this is how we learn through the structures of a PLC.

7) Staff at the school should focus on the school climate to ensure a shared common vision and values for the school learning community. The school should be a large PLC that articulates the mission and vision to the stakeholders about the culture of teaching and learning at the school. When teachers are unable to express the shared vision or do not have the same shared beliefs, then disorganization will occur within the PLC and across the school community.
8) Principals should establish supportive conditions for the PLC by not scheduling interrupted PLC meetings with issues or topics enforced by school leadership. The PLC participants should be given their proper autonomy to discuss complex instructional problems and make decisions to address these issues. The principal should ensure that teachers generate PLC topics aligned to school goals, initiatives, or student learning.

Suggestions for Future Research

The following suggestions for future research are based on the research findings to further investigate the influences of principal leadership behaviors on the implementation of professional learning communities. As stated above, principal leadership behaviors are a significant influence on the development of PLCs. This research results concluded which PLCs' dimensions received the most focus in the development of PLCs. The research study focused on one aspect that influences the development of professional learning communities, that being the principal leadership behaviors. The list below serves as a suggestion, and is not inclusive of all areas for future research. The reader may find additional areas that warrant further consideration

after reading the study. To understand the potential components that could lead to developing professional learning communities, the researcher proposes the following additional topics for future research:

1) The influence of other factors (i.e., teacher efficacy, distributed leadership, school culture, trust, or school climate) on the development of professional learning communities.
2) The role and influence of the school district central office on the development and implementation of professional learning communities.
3) Replication of the study by intentionally exploring four principals' behaviors who exhibit a different leadership style (i.e., transformational, instructional, distributive, and situational) to determine any differences or similarities on the development of PLCs.
4) The positive and negative aspects of developing PLCs at Title I or non-Title I school as well as the effects on the school staff.
5) The effects of multiple administrative changes and leadership styles on the development of professional learning communities.
6) The influence of an assistant principal or PLC facilitator in developing professional learning communities and the role they play in PLCs.
7) Increase the number of schools involved in the study, therefore making the study have a quantitative approach. The study can examine the relationship of principal leadership behaviors on the development of professional learning communities versus Title I and non-Title I schools.
8) Replication of the study in secondary schools to determine whether the same findings emerge.

9) Replication of the study exploring a five-year case study of the school's journey in the process of developing PLCs. Examining the principal leadership behaviors in the development of PLCs over five years of data collection.

Conclusion

The role of the principal to focus on school reform initiatives is to improve teachers' collaboration, teachers' capacity, and student achievement. For school improvement to occur, the leadership of the school principal is critical (Edmonds, 1979; Leithwood, 2005; Hord, 1997; Dufour & Eaker, 1998). The need for professional learning communities is essential to impact all aspects of learning in schools. Conducting additional research on incorporating PLCs within the school system will demonstrate the need for collaborative teamwork. Also, PLCs can transform the nature of adult learning by engaging teachers in the continuous improvement process that we empower our students to complete.

References

About PLCs | All Things PLC | Powered by Solution Tree. (n.d.). Retrieved March 26, 2018, from http://www.allthingsplc.info/about

Blank, R.K., and de las Alas, N. (2009). The Effects of Teacher Professional Development on Gains in Student Achievement: How Meta Analysis Provides Scientific Evidence Useful to Education Leaders. Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers.

Biklen, S. K., & Bogdan, R. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods.* Boston, MA: Pearson Allyn & Bacon.

Bolman, L.G. & Deal, T.E. (2013), *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*, (5th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Buffum, A., Mattos, M. & Weber, C. (2009). *Pyramid response to intervention*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Carpenter, D. (2015). School culture and leadership of professional learning communities. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *29*(5), 682–694.

Claridge, T. (2004). Social capital and natural resource management. *Unpublished Thesis, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia*. Retrieved from https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Social-Capital-and-NRM.pdf

Claridge, T. (2018, January 6). What is Bonding Social Capital? Retrieved March 26, 2018, from https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/what-is-bonding-social-capital/

Claridge, T. (2018, January 15). What is Structural Social Capital? Retrieved March 26, 2018, from https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/structural-social-capital/

Coleman, J. S. (1966). Equality of education opportunity. Washington DC.: United States Government Printing Office.

Copland, M. A., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Connecting Leadership with Learning: A Framework for Reflection, Planning, and Action*. ASCD.

Cranston, J. (2017). Holding the Reins of the Professional Learning Community: Eight Themes From Research on Principals' Perceptions of Professional Learning Communities. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, (90). Retrieved from https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/42771

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

Darling-Hammond, L., & McLaughlin, M. W. (1995). Policies that support professional development in an era of reform. Phi Delta Kappan, 76 (8).

Desimone, L.M., and Garet, M.S. (2015). Best Practices in Teachers' Professional Development in the United States. *Psychology, Society and Education*. 7(3): 252–263.

DuFour, R. (2004). What is a "professional learning community"? *Educational Leadership: Journal of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, N.E.A*, *61*(8), 6–11.

DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2013). *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work TM*. Solution Tree Press.

Dufour, R., Eaker, R., & Dufour, R. (2007). The power of professional learning communities at work: Bringing the big ideas to life. *Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree*.

DuFour, R., & Marzano, R. J. (2011). *Leaders of Learning: How District, School, and Classroom Leaders Improve Student Achievement.* Solution Tree Press.

Edmonds, R. (1979). Effective schools for the urban poor. *Educational Leadership: Journal of the Department of Supervision and Curriculum Development, N.E.A*.

Edwards, R; Holland, J. (2013). What is qualitative interviewing? *Bloomsbury Academic*, pp. 2–3.

Elmore, R. (2000). Building a New Structure for School Leadership. Washington, The Albert Shanker Institute.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) | U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). Retrieved March 29, 2018, from https://www.ed.gov/essa

Ferry, K. (2017, September 5). Six Essential Skills of Shared Leadership. Retrieved from https://www.kornferry.com/institute/shared-leadership-skills

Forward, L. (2015, August 27). How Professional Learning Communities Benefit Students and Teachers. Retrieved March 26, 2018, from http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/learning_forwards_pd_watch/2015/08/how_professional_learning_communities_benefit_students_and_teachers.html

Four Instructional Leadership Skills Principals Need. (2013, April 30). Retrieved April 20, 2018, from https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/leaders-link/four-instructional-leadership-skills-principals-need/

Fullan, M. (2001) *Leading in a Culture of Change*. San Francisco, Jossey Bass.

Fullan, M. (2006). Leading professional learning. *The School Administrator*.

Garmston, R., & Wellman, B. (1999). *The Adaptive School: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon

Gardner, D. P., & Others, A. (1983). A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform. *The Elementary School Journal*, 84(2), 113–130.

Glesne, C. (2006). Making words fly: Developing understanding through interviewing. *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction*.

Goleman, D. (2006). *Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books.

Goodland, J. (1984). *A place called school: Prospects for the future.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Graham, P. (2007). Improving Teacher Effectiveness through Structured Collaboration: A Case Study of a Professional Learning Community. *RMLE Online*, *31*(1), 1–17.

Greer, J. A. (2012). "Professional learning and collaboration." (Doctor of Education, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University). Retrieved from https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/f979/5079f81d4507f0d519572ff98a5237a9dfce.pdf

Hallinger, P., & Murphy, J. (1985). Assessing the instructional leadership behavior of principals. *Elementary School Journal*, 86(2), 217–248.

Hallinger P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflection of the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 33(3), 329-351.

Harris, D. A. (2014). Distributed leadership. Retrieved from https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/articles/distributed-leadership

Harvard University (PA 765: Social Capital Theory. (n.d.). Retrieved March 26, 2018, from https://sites.hks.harvard.edu/saguaro/web%20docs/GarsonSK06syllabus.htm

Hersey, P., Blanchard, K. & Johnson, D. (1996). *Management of Organizational Behavior: Utilizing Human Resources,* 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1996), pp. 188–223.

History of PLC | All Things PLC | Powered by Solution Tree. (n.d.). Retrieved March 26, 2018, from http://www.allthingsplc.info/about/history-of-plc

Hord, S. M (1996). School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire. Austin, TX. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S.M. (1997). Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and

improvement. Austin: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Hord, S. M. (2004). *Learning together, leading together: Changing Schools through professional learning communities.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hord, S. (2008). Evolution of the Professional Learning Communities. *NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL*, 29(3). Retrieved from https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2008/06/evolution-of-the-professional-learning-community-pdf.

Hoy, W., Tarter, C, & Bliss, F. (1990). School characteristics and faculty trust in secondary schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 25, 294–309.

Hoy, W. K., & Sweetland, S. R. (2000). School bureaucracies that work: Enabling, not coercive. *Journal of School Leadership,* Volume 10, 10(6), 525–541.

Jarvis, P. (2004). *Adult education and lifelong learning: Theory and practice*. Routledge.

Introduction to Social Capital Research – Social Capital Research & Training. (n.d.). Retrieved March 26, 2018, from https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/literature/introduction-social-capital-research/

Kelley, R. C., Thornton, B., & Daugherty, R. (2005). Relationships between measures of leadership and school climate. *Education*, 126(1), 17–25.

Knowles, M. (n.d.). Andragogy (Malcolm Knowles) – InstructionalDesign.org. Retrieved from http://www.instructionaldesign.org/theories/andragogy

Knowles, M.S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: from pedagogy to Andragogy* (2nd ed.). New York: Cambridge Books.

Kukic, S. J. (2008, October 15). The Need for Professional Learning Communities. *RTI Action Network*. Retrieved from http://www.rtinetwork.org/rti-blog/entry/1/20

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (1997). Explaining variation in teachers' perceptions of principals' leadership: A replication. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 35(4), 312–331.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2005). Transformational leadership. *The Essentials of School Leadership*, 31–43.

Leo, T., & D'Ette, C. (2000). Issues ... about Change, Launching Professional Learning Communities: Beginning Actions. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), 8(1). Retrieved from http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues81/5.html

Lezotte, L. W. (2001). Revolutionary and evolutionary: The effective schools movement. Retrieved May 17, 2011.

Lieberman, A., & Rosenholtz, S. (1987). The road to school improvement: Barriers and bridges. In J. Goodland (Ed.), *The ecology of school renewal: Eighty-sixth yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (pp. 79-98). Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education.

Lortie, D., (1975). *Schoolteacher*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

McCargar, J. P. (2003). Stronger accountability testing for results. Retrieved November 11, 2003, from http://www.ed.gov/nclb/accountability/.

Marzano, R. J. (2007). Designing a comprehensive approach to classroom assessment. *Ahead of the Curve: The Power of Assessment to Transform Teaching and Learning*, 103–126.

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Mathewson, Tara Garcia. (2016, August 18). Professional learning communities bring benefits for teachers, students. Retrieved March 26, 2018, from

https://www.educationdive.com/news/professional-learning-communities-bring-benefits-for-teachers-students/424647

Maxwell, J. C. (2003). *Five levels of leadership*. Maximum Impact.

McGee, S. (2016). The Relative Influence of Formal Learning Opportunities versus Indicators of Professional Community on Changes in Science Teaching in Urban Schools. *Journal of Urban Learning, Teaching, and Research*, 12, 150–162.

Merriam, et al (2007). *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide*, p. 87.

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco, CA; Jossey-Bass.

Newton, E. (1977). Andragogy: Understanding the Adult as a Learner. *Journal of Reading,* 20(5), 361–363. Retrieved from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40032981

Osman, A. A. (2012). School climate the key to excellence. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies*, 3(6), 950.

Pappas, C. (2013, May 9). The Adult Learning Theory – Andragogy – of Malcolm Knowles – eLearning Industry. Retrieved July 5, 2018, from https://elearningindustry.com/the-adult-learning-theory-andragogy-of-malcolm-knowles

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Provini, C. (2012). Best Practices for Professional Learning Communities | Education World. *Education World*. Retrieved from https://www.educationworld.com/a_admin/best-practices-for-professional-learning-communities.shtml

Robinson, V.M., Lloyd, C.A., & Rowe, K.J. (2008). The impact on leadership on student outcomes: An analysis on the different effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44(5), 635–674.

Rosenholtz, S. J. (1989). *Teachers' workplace: The social organization of schools*. Addison-Wesley Longman Ltd.

Senge, Peter M. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline*: *The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization.*

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1994). *Building Community in Schools*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Servage, L. (2009). Who is the "professional" in a professional learning community? An exploration of teacher professionalism in collaborative professional development settings. *Canadian Journal of History of Sport and Physical Education*, 32(1), 149.

Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (1999). Distributed leadership: Toward a theory of school leadership practice. IPF Working Papers 99-3, Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University. Retrieved from http://ideas.repec.org!p/wop/nwuipr/99-3.html

Strahan, D. (2003). Promoting a collaborative professional culture in three elementary schools that have beaten the odds. *The Elementary School Journal*, 104(2), 127–146.

Stronge, J. H., Richard, H. B., & Catano, N. (2008). Qualities of effective principals. Alexandria, VA: Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Thompson, S. C., Gregg, L., & Niska, J. M. (2004). Professional learning communities, leadership, and student learning. *RMLE Online*, *28*(1), 1–15.

Title I, Part A Program. (2018). Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html

Tsai, W., & Ghoshal, S. (1998). Social capital and value creation: The role of intrafirm networks. *Academy of Management Journal,* 41, 464–478.

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). "Public School Teacher Data File," 2011–12.

U. S. Department of Education. (2015). *Improving basic programs operated by local educational agencies* (Title I, Part A). US Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education.

United States Department of Education. (2008). A nation accountable. Washington, DC.

Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), 80–91.

Witziers, B., Bosker, R. J., & Kruger, M. L. (2003). Educational leadership and student achievement: The elusive search for an association. *Educational Administration Quarterly,* 39 (3), 398–425.

Zheng, X., Yin, H., Liu, Y., & Ke, Z. (2016). Effects of leadership practices on professional learning communities: the mediating role of trust in colleagues. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 17(3), 521–532.

Yoon, K.S., Duncan, T., Lee, S.W.-Y., Scarloss, B., and Shapley, K. (2007). Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement (Issues and Answers Report, REL 2007-No. 033). National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC.

Appendix A

Letter to Principal

March 22, 2019

Dear Principal,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study: "The Influence of Principal Leadership Behaviors on the Development of Professional Learning Communities in Title I and non-Title I schools." I am currently enrolled at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, in the Executive Ed. D. program as a doctoral student in the Department of Education Leadership, Management, and Policy. Your participation in this study will bring valuable insight as to how principals' leadership behaviors shape the implementation of PLCs in elementary schools and how PLCs function in your school outlining the three guiding principles of effective PLC (focus on learning, focus on results, and focus on collaboration).

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may, at any time, withdraw your consent without penalty. There are no benefits associated with participation apart from contributing to the further understanding of how principals' leadership behaviors shape the implementation of PLCs in Title I or non-Title I elementary schools. There are no associated risks with participating in this study. I greatly appreciate your input provided by participating in an interview. The semi-structured interview will take approximately 45-60 minutes to complete. Confidentiality will be protected throughout this study. You will not be asked any identifiable information. Data gathered from the interview and observation will be presented in an aggregated format without identifiable information. All data will be stored on a USB drive and locked in a file cabinet in my office only assessable to me.

Should you wish to discuss any aspects of this study, you may reach me via email at Alicia.kingcade@student.shu.edu. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Martin Finkelstein, via email at Martin.Finkelstein@shu.edu. Please email me three convenient interview dates with times. Once your dates have been received I will contact you via email to confirm the actual date and time of your interview and site PLC observations. Teacher interviews will follow shortly after based on their availability. If you have an upcoming faculty meeting, I can come in to present my research, solicit teachers, and schedule interview times. If you do not have an upcoming faculty meeting I can meet with your teachers for the aforementioned purposes during their planning or another time you see fit. In all, it will only take 10-15 minutes; please let me know your preference. I will attach the staff presentation for your review prior to meeting.

Again, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I look forward to meeting and learning from you.

Respectfully,

Alicia Kingcade

Appendix B

The Principal Interview Protocol

Interviewer's Copy

The researcher will say:

The purpose of this study is to understand the functioning of professional learning communities at your school. The research study will seek to uncover principal leadership behaviors that influence the implementation of professional learning communities in elementary schools with a diverse student population. Utilizing the three guiding principles of professional learning communities as a means of understanding the effectiveness of PLC, this study will examine if the principals' leadership behaviors shape the implementation of PLC in elementary schools.

By the end of the interview, my goal is to understand how you applied specific leadership behaviors to implement professional learning communities at your school. The interview has two significant components about your perception of PLCs and your perspective on your team's practices to implement PLCs.

I will use the responses from this interview to gain an understanding of specific leadership practices that influence the implementation of PLCs. I can assure you that your responses and identity throughout this research will remain anonymous. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete and I will audio record your responses and later transcribe your answers. During the interview, I may take notes which will be transcribed, and all transcriptions are available for your review after completion. Thank you for volunteering to conduct this interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Principal Interview Questions
Research Question 1- How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I?
1. How would you describe the PLC in your school? a) How did it get started? b) What role did you play in the development of PLCs at your school? c) What role do you play now in PLCs?
2. How are decisions made in the PLC? a) Provide an example of a recent decision? b) Describe how the decision was reached. c) What role did you play in making the decision? d) After the decision was reached, describe in detail how the team and/or you implemented and followed through on the decision.
3. Share an experience when the team had to come to consensus about a specific focus to address student learning. a) What is the process to ensure the work from the PLC is transferred into instruction?
4. What does collective learning look like within your school's professional learning communities? a) How often does the PLC meet to discuss student-centered issues? Can you give an example of how the PLC addressed an unfulfilled student need in the past year? b) What are your expectations of the PLC discussing teaching and learning? Provide a time when the PLC discussed teaching strategies and a plan of implementation? c) Describe an example of learning within PLCs. (ex. Book study, video/model lessons, curriculum study, unpacking standards) d) How did the team ensure all members of the PLC implemented the plan? e) If yes, how did the team assess their progress towards the plan? f) If the plan did not work, did the team make revisions? g) How does your team self-evaluate their overall effectiveness as a PLC?
5. Do peers review and give feedback after observing one another's classroom behaviors in order to increase capacity? a) If yes, how is this task accomplished in your school? b) What measures of fidelity are used to track changes in teaching and student learning as a result of this feedback?
6. What are some ways in which you support the work of the PLCs? What are some ways in which school supports creates barriers? a) Who creates the agenda of the PLC? b) Does the agenda of the PLC consider staff learning needs, student academic needs, and/or staff interactions? c) Describe the PLCs' processes to encourage equal participation within the PLC? d) Can you provide an example of a time when the members of the PLC demonstrated trust and openness? e) Provide an experience when trust and openness did not exist in the PLC?

Research Question 2- To what extent, and in what ways, does principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?
1. To what extent and in what ways do you interact with the PLCs at your school? Please describe in detail your interaction with PLCs within this school year. a) Time? b) Commitment? c) Resources? d) Sharing ideas?
2. To be an effective principal, what leadership style, practices, knowledge, and abilities must one possess when implementing PLCs? a) How do these practices or abilities appear in the implementation of PLCs at your school? b) What would you rank the most important quality one must possess? Why is it the most important?
3. What do you perceive as your role in the implementation of PLCs? a) Describe your level of comfort in implementing professional learning communities. b) Explain your level of comfort in developing professional learning communities.
4. What significant changes or developments you had to make to implement professional learning communities? a) How did you feel about making this change or development? b) How did your staff feel about the change or development? c) What is your role in this initiative? d) What factors did you consider when making the change or development?
5. Did the change or development you implemented presented to be a challenge? a) If yes, in what way was it challenging? b) If no, why was it not a challenge?
6. Can you describe an example of a time when your behaviors influenced the PLC's focus on learning? a) How is the PLC maintained? b) Who plays what roles in the PLC? c) How is leadership distributed within the PLC? d) Have you established any expectations of focus on learning amongst the team? If yes, what are the expectations? If now, why haven't you established the expectations?
7. Describe an example of when you may have influenced the PLC's focus on results? a) What role do you play in having the team focus on results? b) Have you established any expectations of focus on results amongst the team? If yes, what are the expectations? If now, why haven't you established the expectations?
8. Can you describe an example of when your behaviors influenced the collaborative teamwork of the PLC? a) What role do you play in the collaborative work of the PLC? b) Have you established any expectations about collaboration amongst the team? If yes, what are the expectations? If now, why haven't you established the expectations?
9. How would you describe the essential characteristics of your school's PLCs? a) What are its strengths? b) Limitations?

Closing Remarks

The researcher will say:

We have reached the end of the interview. Thank you for your participation. As stated earlier your identity will remain anonymous and will not be included in any part of the final product of the dissertation. After transcribing your interview, if I have follow-up questions and the need arises, I will contact you to set up a second interview at your convenience. Do you have any questions for me at this time? If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to notify me via phone or email. I will now stop the audio recording. Thank you again for your time.

Appendix C

Letter to Teachers

March 22, 2019

Dear Colleague,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study "The Influence of Principal Leadership Behaviors on the Development of Professional Learning Communities in Title I and non-Title I schools." I am currently enrolled at Seton Hall University, South Orange, New Jersey, in the Executive Ed. D. program as a doctoral student in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy. Your participation in this study will bring valuable insight as to how principals' leadership behaviors shape the implementation of PLCs in elementary schools and how PLCs function in your school outlining the three guiding principles of effective PLCs (focus on learning, focus on results, and focus on collaboration).

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may, at any time, withdraw your consent without penalty. There are no benefits associated with participation apart from contributing to the further understanding of how principals' leadership behaviors shape the implementation of PLC in elementary schools and your perception of your team's practices to implement PLC. There are no associated risks with participating in this study. Data gathered from the interview and observations will be presented in an aggregated format without individual identifiable information. All data will be stored on a USB drive and locked in a file cabinet in my office only assessable to me.

Should you wish to discuss any aspects of this study, you may reach me via email at Alicia.kingcade@student.shu.edu. You may also contact my dissertation advisor, Dr. Martin Finkelstein, via email at Martin.Finkelstein@shu.edu.

My intended research start date is (insert start date) through (insert end date). Once your principal has confirmed my start date, I will email you a list of proposed interview dates and times. Please indicate three convenient interview dates with times from the provided list. Once your dates have been received, I will contact you via email to confirm the actual date and time of your interview. Lastly, attached to this letter is the research consent form. Please read, sign, and date the consent form. All findings and copies of your signed consent forms will be made available to you upon your request.

Again, thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this study. I look forward to meeting and learning from you.

Respectfully,

Alicia Kingcade

Appendix D

The Teacher Interview Protocol

Interviewer's Copy

The researcher will say:

The purpose of this study is to understand the functioning of professional learning communities in your elementary school. The research study will seek to uncover the overall functioning of PLCs and factors that affect the functioning of the PLC. Utilizing the three guiding principles of professional learning communities as a means of understanding the effectiveness of PLCs, this study will examine if the principals' leadership behaviors shape the implementation of PLCs in elementary schools.

By the end of the interview, my goal is to understand how you viewed or experienced professional learning communities at your school. The interview has two significant components about your perception of PLCs and your perspective on your team's practices to implement PLCs.

I will use the responses from this interview to gain an understanding of specific leadership styles that influence the implementation of PLCs. I can assure you that your responses and identity throughout this research will remain confidential. The interview will take approximately 45 minutes to complete and I will audio record your responses and later transcribe your answers. During the interview, I may take notes which will also be transcribed, and all transcriptions are available for your review after completion. Thank you for volunteering to conduct this interview. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Teacher Interview Questions
Research Question 1- How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I?
1. How does your team analyze data and create a common SMART goal or action plan that addresses essential student learning? a) Share an experience when the team had to come to consensus about a specific focus to address student learning. b) Provide an example of a time when the PLC identified students' academic needs that were not being addressed. c) What is the process to ensure the work from the PLC is transferred into instruction?
2. How does administration participate with teachers to share power, authority, and decision making in regards to professional learning communities? a) What approaches to problem solving and decision making does your team utilize? b) Provide an example of a recent team decision. c) Describe how the decision was reached. d) What role did the principal play? e) After the decision was reached, describe in detail how the team and/or principal implemented and followed through on the decision.
3. What does collective learning look like within your professional learning community? a) How often does the PLC meet to discuss student-centered issues? b) Provide an experience of a time when the PLC discussed teaching strategies and a plan for implementation. c) Describe an example of learning within your PLC. (ex. Book study, video/model lessons, curriculum study, unpacking standards) d) How did the team ensure all members of the PLC implemented the plan? e) If yes, how did the team assess their progress towards the plan? f) If the plan did not work, did the team make revisions? g) How does your team self-evaluate their overall effectiveness as a PLC? h) If so, how regularly do team self-assessments occur?
4. Do peers review and give feedback after observing one another's teaching in order to increase individual or organizational capacity? a) If yes, how is this task accomplished in your school? b) What measures of fidelity are used to track changes in teaching and student learning as a result of this feedback?
5. What are some ways in which the leadership supports the work of the PLCs? What are some ways in which it creates barriers? a) Who creates the agendas for the PLC? b) Does the agenda of the PLC consider staff learning needs, student academic needs, and/or staff interactions? c) Describe your PLCs' processes to encourage equal participation within the PLC. d) Can you provide an example of a time when the members of the PLC demonstrated trust and openness? e) Can you provide an experience when trust and openness did not exist in the PLC? f) What challenges of team PLC work do you feel the leadership imposes? g) Which supports from leadership are most helpful to your team's ongoing work in PLCs?

Research Question 2- To what extent, and in what ways, does principal leadership shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?
1. How would you describe your principal as a leader/manager? a) How does your principal interact with the PLCs? b) Describe an interaction your principal has had in one of your PLCs.
2. What do you perceive your principal's role is in the implementation of PLCs?
3. What is your impression of your principal's level of comfort in implementing professional learning communities?
4. Describe an example when the principal's leadership behaviors influenced the focus of educator learning for your team's PLC?
5. Describe an example when the principal influenced the PLC's focus on results.
6. How does the principal play a vital role in the collaborative work of the PLC? a) Describe an example of when the principal influenced the collaborative teamwork of the PLC.
7. How would you describe the essential characteristics of your PLC? a) How is the PLC maintained? b) Who plays what roles in the PLC? c) How is leadership distributed within the PLC? d) What are its strengths? e) Limitations?

Closing Remarks

The researcher will say:

We have reached the end of the interview. Thank you for your participation. As stated earlier, your identity will remain confidential and will not be included in any part of the final product of the dissertation. After transcribing your interview, if I have follow-up questions and the need arises, I will contact you to set up a second interview at your convenience. Do you have any questions for me at this time? If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to notify me via phone or email at 302-229-3665 or Alicia.kingcade@student.shu.edu. I will now stop the audio recording. Thank you again for your time.

Appendix E

PLC Observation Protocol

Purpose: This protocol is designed to capture the three key elements of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). The three key elements are shared vision, collaboration, and reflective dialogue. The three elements are closely aligned to the guiding principles of PLC which are: focus on learning, collaboration, and results. The observation protocol will provide a deeper understanding of how teams work together as a PLC.

Key Elements	Observation Evidence
Shared Vision and Focus on Learning- PLCs focus on student learning which helps to develop a consciousness about norms and values to increase clarity and cohesion within the learning community. • The agenda addresses activities on teacher learning, student data review, or student learning (ex: objectives, learning outcomes, data analysis questions, learning strategies on content knowledge). • Team covers all agenda items within the allotted time (indicator of efficacy). • List of essential learning standards for unit of study. (common essential learning standards- prioritized) • List of PLC's norms posted in the room or agenda. • The agenda or meeting discussion addresses for each action step- Who? What? When? And next steps.	
Collaboration- PLCs focus on developing collaborative cultures by sharing of expertise, learning best practices, and examining students' data to mutually support each other to have effective instruction. • The number of team members present/total number of required PLC participants (attendance). • The number of times each team member shared an idea. (mutual support and participation) • The number of times a team member agreed or disagreed with an opinion or point of view. (Open and trust to disagree/cooperative) • Process or document that shows shared responsibilities among all members of the team (rotating roles-note taker, time keeper, facilitator, process observer). (allocation of responsibilities)	
Reflective Dialogue: PLCs focus on a reflective dialogue allows opportunities to develop self-awareness and collective awareness of practices, learning, and work. • Completion of a reflective tool the team used to monitor their progress. • Evidence of Plus/Delta completion or notes from process observer in meeting minutes. (focus shows the team monitors its progress and adjusts its processes to become more effective). • Track the number of opportunities the team has to consider ideas before deciding what might work best.(ability to respectfully negotiate- consensus)	

Garmston, R., & Wellman, B. (1999). *The Adaptive School: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups.* Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon

Appendix F

Research Board Approval Form

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: The impact of principal leadership behaviors on the development of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools H2019.4.11

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making this application, I(we) certify that I(we) have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I(we) further acknowledge my(our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

Alicia Kingcade — 4/1/2019
RESEARCHER(S) — DATE

**Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature.
Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.**

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials of my student advisee and consider them to meet IRB standards.

RESEARCHER'S FACULTY ADVISOR [for student researchers only] — 4/8/19 DATE

Please print or type out name below signature

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the May 2019 meeting.

The application was approved ✓ not approved ___ by the Committee. Special conditions were ___ were not ✓ set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

Mary J. Fenjicke, Ph.D. — 5-29-19 DATE

DIRECTOR,
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL
REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

Seton Hall University
3/2005

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
1 8 5 6

May 29, 2019

Alicia Kingcade

[redacted]

Dear Ms. Kingcade,

The Research Ethics Committee of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board office has reviewed and approved as completed under expedited review your research proposal entitled "The Impact of Principal Leadership Behaviors on the Development of Professional Learning Communities in Title 1 and non-Title 1 Schools."

Enclosed for your records is the signed Request for Approval form.

Reflecting the process for federally funded research, there will be no longer be a continuing review. Informed Consent documents and recruitment flyers will no longer be stamped.

Thank you for you cooperation.

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph D

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.
Professor
Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Martin Finkelstein

Please review Seton Hall University IRB's Policies and Procedures on website (http://www.provost.shu.edu/IRB) for more information. Please note the following requirements:
Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or adverse reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to immediately notify in writing the Seton Hall University IRB Director, your sponsor and any federal regulatory institutions which may oversee this research, such as the OHRP or the FDA. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending further review by the IRB.
Amendments: If you wish to change **any** aspect of this study, please communicate your request in writing (with revised copies of the protocol and/or informed consent where applicable and the Amendment Form) to the IRB Director. The new procedures cannot be initiated until you receive IRB approval.

Office of Institutional Review Board
Presidents Hall • 400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, NJ 07079 • Tel: 973.313.6314 • Fax: 973.275.2361 • www.shu.edu

Appendix G

Inform Consent

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

Appendix G

INFORMED CONSENT

Title of the Study: The Influence of Principal Leadership Behaviors on the Development of Professional Learning Communities in Title I and non-Title I schools

Researcher: Alicia R. Kingcade, Student in the Executive Leadership Doctoral (Ed. D) Program

Purpose of the Study:

The purposes of this research are to (a) explain how principal leadership behaviors influence the implementation of professional learning communities, (b) explore perceptions of how the PLC functions in Title I and non-Title I schools.

Procedures:

Participants will share their perception of their principals' leadership behaviors and how the PLC functions by engaging in a 20-30 minutes audio-recorded interview. The researcher will take hand written notes if the participant does not consent to an audio-recorded interview. The interview will take place on site at the participant's school or via phone. At the beginning of the interview the researcher will express the purpose of the research and reiterate the voluntary nature of participation. The participant will be given a code name that will be used throughout the research process. The researcher will then proceed to ask interview questions related to research questions.

Research Questions:

1. How are PLCs functioning at elementary schools in Alexandria City Public Schools in Title I and non-Title I?
2. To what extent, and in what ways, do principal leadership behaviors shape the implementation of professional learning communities in Title I and non-Title I schools?

Instrumentation:

The interview protocol will consist of semi-structured questions which will be used to explore the participant's perception of their principal leadership behaviors that shape the implementation of PLC and the function of PLCs at their schools. The summation of the

interview protocol will lead to the research questions being answered.

Voluntary Nature:

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Participants are not obligated to answer any question they do not feel comfortable answering. At any time the participant may elect to cease participation in this study. There will be absolutely no penalty or loss of benefit to which the participant is otherwise entitled.

Anonymity:

Each participant and their school will be assigned a coded name (Teacher A, School A). All data collected, transcribe, and reported data will use the coded names for anonymity purposes.

Confidentiality:

All information gathered will be kept confidential. No identifiable information will be made that will link the participant to the study. The researcher will be the only person with access to identifying information and coding schema.

Records:

All data, audio recording files and coding information will be stored on an USB drive and locked securely in a file cabinet for three years after the completion of the study. At the conclusion of the three year time frame, all data files will be destroyed.

Potential Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known anticipated risks or conflicts of interest associated with in this study.

Potential Benefits:

There are no direct benefits associated with participation. Your participation in this study will significantly contribute to the field of educational professional learning by highlighting leadership behaviors that shape the development of PLCs in Title I and non-Title I schools.

Compensation:

There is no compensation benefit associated with participation in this study.

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY

Contact Information:

If the participation has questions pertaining to rights as a human subject, please contact Seton Hall University IRB via phone (973) 313-6314 or via email irb@shu.edu.

If the participant has any questions pertaining to the research, please contact the Primary Investigator/Doctoral Student Alicia Kingcade via phone [ ] or via email Alicia.kingcade@student.shu.edu or Faculty Advisor Dr. Martin Finkelstein via phone [ ] or via email martin.finkelstein@shu.edu.

Participant Consent:

In the event that you are willing to participate in this study, I kindly ask that you sign and date this consent form. By signing this document, I agree to participate in this research study as it has been described to me. A copy of this signed and dated Informed Consent form will be provided to you.

_____
Participant Printed Name

_____ _____
Participant Signature Date

Audio-Recording Consent

Please check your preference

☐ I consent to an audio-recorded interview

☐ I do not consent to an audio-recorded interview