A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF K-12 SCHOOL CAMPUS ADMINISTRATORS'

EXPERIENCES SUSTAINING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

by

Brandy C. Sirchia Huguet

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University

2018

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF K-12 SCHOOL CAMPUS ADMINISTRATORS'

EXPERIENCES SUSTAINING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

by Brandy C. Sirchia Huguet

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2018

APPROVED BY:

Kenneth R. Tierce, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Elgen Hillman, Ph.D., Committee Member

Jennifer E. Wheat, Ed.D., Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to examine administrators'

experiences sustaining professional learning communities (PLCs) in three Southeast Louisiana

school districts. At this stage of the research, sustained PLCs will be defined as professional

learning communities that have been established using The System for Teacher and Student

Advancement (TAP) and/or Best Practices Center (BPC) structures and continued for two or

more years. The questions guiding this research sought to discover how administrators describe

their roles in sustaining PLCs in Louisiana schools, what structures administrators perceive

necessary to sustain PLCs, how administrators support an environment conducive to sustaining

PLCs, and what challenges, if any, administrators face in sustaining PLCs. The theories that

guided this study were Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory as it supports leading

individuals in collaborative goal attainment and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory on goal

setting and motivation. Administrators in respective schools were emailed surveys to complete

to ascertain their perceptions of PLCs. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or by

teleconference for the participants' convenience. Documents related to PLCs within the

administrators' school environments were requested and analyzed using open coding to identify

common themes. A focus group interview was conducted after initial interviews with a small

group of administrators. Members of the focus group were asked to create a mind map to present

a visual representation of their perceptions of PLCs. All data collected were reviewed and coded

for common themes. It is hoped that this study will provide a voice for the experiences of

administrators leading schools with sustained PLCs.

Keywords: professional learning communities, PLCs, transformational leadership

Copyright Page

Dedication

      This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather John Vincent Sirchia who was an absolutely amazing man. His work ethic was beyond reproach, his love for God and others surpassed all, and he was the best Paw-Paw for which a girl could ask. Though I wish I could remember more, I remember so much about Paw-Paw like how he spent mornings reading his prayer books and the long hours he worked in his garden. My Saturdays were spent with him and my sister watching Hee-Haw, Lawrence Welk, and playing card games on the floor. When we would ask him to sit on the floor with us, Paw-Paw used to say, "If Paw-Paw sits down on the floor, he might not be able to get up," but he would sit on the floor anyway. Through it all one of the greatest lessons Paw-Paw taught me was the value of education. He repeatedly told stories of how he had to quit school in the sixth grade and work to help his family, noting, "Paw-Paw don't have no education." He told his story to emphasize the importance of me getting my education because as he said, "That's one thing, no one can take away your education." I was so proud to walk across that stage to receive my Bachelor of Arts degree in English and be able to have Paw-Paw watch me receive my degree. Sadly, I lost this wonderful man on my birthday, April 29, almost 15 years ago. He was not here when my beautiful son and daughter entered the world, or when we built our "brick home" that he so often spoke of hoping me to one day have. He was not in the audience when I earned my Master of Education degree, and I could not tell him about my education specialist degree or the fact that I decided to pursue my doctorate. I am so proud of myself for achieving these things, but I also know how proud Paw-Paw would be of all these accomplishments. I wish he could have been standing by my side for each of them. Until we meet again Paw-Paw, "I love you a bushel and a peck and a hug around the neck."

Acknowledgments

This dissertation journey has been arduous and rewarding; however, it would not have been possible to achieve my goal of earning my doctorate without the help of several significant individuals.

To my husband, Heith: I want to thank you for your support and assistance in helping me achieve my goal. Without your love, support, and willingness to complete the many household tasks that you so lovingly took on, I would have never been able to accomplish all of the hours of work necessary to reach this destination. You were an encourager when I thought I could not do one more thing to complete this process. You helped me focus on the end results. You were and still are my biggest cheerleader. You will go to bat for me and stand up for me when I am unwilling or unable to stand up for myself. I am thankful God gave me you to be my helper in life. Thank you for all you have done to make me a better person.

To my beautiful children, Emerson and Eden: Thank you for allowing me the time I needed to work on the many hours of coursework and writing that took so many hours away from you. I hope you know that I did this not only for me but for you also. I hope I was able to show you the value of working hard to achieve your goals and the necessity of putting forth your best effort in everything you do. Now that this journey is coming to an end, I look forward to an uninterrupted summer making memories with you. You mean the world to me, and I am very thankful God has allowed me to be your mother.

To my daddy, Joe: "I did it!" Thank you for the many conversations of support and encouragement you provided me along the way. I promised you I would finish college, and I hope I have exceeded your expectations. I love you very much!

To my sister, Jasmyne: Thank you for making me feel like Superwoman when I just feel inferior. You always support and encourage me, even though we do not talk or see each other nearly as often as I would like. I pray now that my doctoral journey has ended we can have more relaxing moments to visit, laugh, and share each other's company. I miss those carefree times we used to share as little girls. I love and appreciate you very much.

To my friend and coworker, Leslie Cuti: Thank you for being a listening ear, encourager, and voice of reason all those times I was frustrated, discouraged, and did not think I could travel one more step on this journey. I pray the effort I exhausted pays off in ways I cannot imagine!

To my friend, Laura MacKenzie: You were the best part of EDUC 919. I am so thankful that Liberty required us to attend two intensive classes that led to our friendship. Your peanut allergy, while I wish it did not exist, helped me approach you in Dr. Dunn's EDUC 730 class to see if you were the person who would be in EDUC 919 with me. I am so thankful for that meeting and for the many times along the way your support and encouragement helped me to complete this doctoral journey. "We did it!"

To Dr. Tierce: Thank you for choosing to chair my dissertation. Your guidance, support, and direction have meant so much to me along the way. I remember being in your class and worrying about performing well with all the class required. You were helpful and thorough in your comments, which allowed me to accomplish what I needed to be successful in your class. When I read your message while searching to see if you had availability to be my dissertation chair that said your goal as a chair does not revolve around your interests but assisting people to pursue their interests, I knew you would be the supportive chair I would need to accomplish earning my doctorate. I am thankful to have traveled this path with you.

To Dr. Hillman: Thank you for being a member of my committee. You were one of the most approachable and available professors I had. I remember your Webex sessions to help us understand what we needed to do for statistics. I am not sure I would have made it through that class so proficiently without your care and support. Your kindness was apparent even through text and email, even though I know you are supposed to read emotion in to those forms of communication. Thank you for your assistance and encouragement throughout this journey.

To Dr. Wheat: I value you personally and professionally. I would have never undertaken this journey without your encouragement and support. You motivated me to pursue my education by modeling the value of the process. I did not want to return to teaching when my life necessitated that I return, but I am very thankful to have met you in that process. Thank you for encouraging, motivating, and inspiring me to accomplish what I set out to accomplish, even when things sometimes feel futile. I am thankful you chose to walk this journey with me by being part of my dissertation committee.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Best Practices Center (BPC)

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

Individualized Education Programs (IEP)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE)

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Professional Learning Community/Communities (PLC/PLCs)

Professional Learning Communities Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R)

Qualitative Data Analysis Software (QDAS)

Response to Intervention (RTI)

School Performance Score (SPS)

The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Student achievement has been at the forefront of educational reform for more than a decade (Every Student Succeeds Act [ESSA], 2015; No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2002), yet student performance does not always meet desired expectations (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). Scholars noted that effective leadership can positively impact student achievement (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Klar & Brewer, 2014), and professional learning communities (PLCs) can improve teacher and student performance (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010). The primary purpose of education is learning rather than instruction, and educators should be facilitators of student learning (Ackoff & Greenburg, 2008). Principals need to create school cultures that develop teacher empowerment and confidence in their abilities to facilitate student learning as well as value students, teachers, parents, and community members to work together for the ultimate educational goal of student learning, which can enhance school performance (Habegger, 2008). With initiatives such as PLCs at the forefront of education, it is important to understand what characteristics contribute to the success of these initiatives. This study sought to understand the administrators' experiences with sustaining PLCs to discover how administrators describe their roles in sustaining PLCs in Louisiana schools, what structures administrators perceive necessary to sustain PLCs, how administrators support an environment conducive to sustaining PLCs, and what challenges, if any, administrators face in sustaining PLCs. Background information on PLCs addressing how PLCs may benefit school climates is introduced. The rationale for exploring the problem is also presented in Chapter One, and the problem and purpose statements for the study are described.

Additionally, the significance of the study is addressed before outlining the research questions and research plan. Key definitions and a chapter summary conclude Chapter One.

Background

Student success is essential in the field of education since the purpose of education is student learning (Ackoff & Greenburg, 2008; Habegger, 2008). Lawmakers have tried to place regulations on measuring student achievement with the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) and the later passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), thus demonstrating the desire to find ways to assess educators' teaching performance and the learning outcomes of students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015), Louisiana's fourth- and eighth-grade students have consistently fallen behind the national average in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores in all subject areas. Successfully educating students requires a shared vision and plan of action for school communities (DuFour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010). Research has examined teachers' experiences and their roles in PLCs, but there is a scarcity of literature exploring administrators' experiences (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Sjoer & Meirink, 2016; Song, 2012; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Leadership styles may impact faculty members' belief in administrators' instructional expertise (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015) and thus affect PLC sustainability.

Historical Context

For more than 15 years, the focus in education has been on greater accountability for educating today's youth in a rigorous manner with classroom preparation that extends to productive skills after graduation (ESSA, 2015; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010; NCLB, 2002). With the enactment of NCLB in 2001, accountability measures of standardized testing became the new norm for educators. Ways to measure student learning

and teacher efficacy continued to develop for over a decade before ESSA was signed into law in

2015 by President Obama. Despite efforts to bridge achievement gaps and assist all students in

achieving academic success, some students still experience academic deficits. According to the

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) state profiles, in 2015, Louisiana fourth and

eighth-grade students scored below national student averages in mathematics, reading, science,

and writing (NCES, 2015). While fourth- and eighth-grade students in Louisiana have made

consistent gains in most academic disciplines since 1992, the fact that students' scores are below

the national average illustrates an opportunity for improvement (NCES, 2015). Identification of

this need for improvement may cause educators to seek ways to bridge the academic

achievement gap to impact student performance successfully.

Social Context

Accountability measures may come with threats of penalties for not achieving a

predetermined level of success yet rarely provide a successful long-term solution in impacting

student performance since educators most often desire to do what is best for student success

(DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2010). Schools possess a greater possibility of enhanced

goal attainment by working collaboratively to address student progression and instructional

requirements (Carpenter, 2015). Leaders must work to create school environments that support

collaboration and student achievement (Gray et al., 2015). Developing and sustaining PLCs,

defined as "educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective

inquiry and action research to achieve better results of the students they serve" can provide a

school culture focused on success (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010, p. 11).

Theoretical Context

Leadership should be tailored to meet the needs of the school community to be most

effective (Klar & Brewer, 2014), and administration encouraging sustained professional learning communities may have positive effects on student achievement. Characteristics of leadership supportive of PLCs are transformative in that there is "a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that converts followers into leaders" (Burns, 1978, p. 4). Administrators should not only be the managers of the school but instructional leaders by exhibiting transformational leadership characteristics. Motivation is a driving force for many individuals; thus, when individuals ground personal fulfillment in goal realization, their pursuit becomes resolute and they work diligently to achieve their objectives (Bandura, 1977). Transformative educational administrators should motivate teachers to strive to achieve a shared vision of success for the school environment and all the students serviced within (Lunenburg & Irby, 2014). With the paucity of literature exploring administrators' experiences in sustaining PLCs (Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Wang, Wang, Li, & Li, 2017), this study seeks to tell the stories of these leaders and their experience in sustaining PLCs to contribute to the body of knowledge of effective ways to sustain PLCs. This knowledge may be beneficial to current and prospective education administrators.

Situation to Self

As a curriculum support teacher, I had the opportunity to work under a principal who embodied transformational leadership. Working as a curriculum support teacher raised the question of how other schools throughout the state sustain PLCs and what role the administrators played in the continued implementation. With aspirations of possibly becoming an administrator later in my career and deeming PLCs as a valuable construct for school and student achievement, I sought to understand this phenomenon better through research. I hoped to add to the body of knowledge a voice of the administrators' experiences in sustaining PLCs that may later be of

benefit to current administrators and educators seeking administrative roles. A methodological assumption was employed through collection of various forms of data and development and modification of analyses throughout the study (Creswell, 2017). I also bring the paradigm of pragmatism to the research with a desire to analyze administrators' roles in sustaining PLCs (Creswell, 2017). My base of knowledge of PLCs and personal belief of effective leadership practices along with the philosophical assumption and paradigm guided my actions throughout this phenomenological study. As I am supportive of PLCs, I must be careful to provide experiences of the participants without sharing any bias I may have regarding PLCs.

Problem Statement

With the implementation of accountability measures assessing school performance and student learning outcomes in schools, a focus on ways to assist teachers in instructional design has been implemented by lawmakers (ESSA, 2015; NCLB, 2002). PLCs are one initiative that has proven successful in positively impacting student achievement and enhancing teacher performance (Kennedy, 2016a.; Lalor & Abawi, 2014; Owen, 2015). Likewise, the importance of effective leadership in impacting student achievement and establishing trust with faculty has been established (Klar & Brewer, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Successful leaders can positively affect teacher and student achievement (Garza, Drysdale, Gurr, Jacobson, & Merchant, 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Klar & Brewer, 2014). Directive leadership may damage positive relationships between administrators and staff (Bennet, Ylimaki, Dugan, & Brundermann, 2013), while distributed leadership may support teacher involvement in school initiatives (Chen & Mitchell, 2015). Principals who promote collaboration focused on student achievement may see impacts on teacher and student performance (Baker-Doyle, 2015; Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Owen, 2016; Pont, 2014). While much research exists on PLCs, further

examination of principals' roles with PLCs is necessary to better understand administrators' perceptions of their roles with PLCs (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Therefore, the problem of this transcendental phenomenological study is administrator perceptions of their lived experience sustaining PLCs in three Southeast Louisiana school districts.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand administrators' perceptions of their experiences sustaining PLCs in three Southeast Louisiana school districts. Administrators in these districts were purposefully selected to reflect schools where PLCs have been sustained. Sustained PLCs were defined as professional learning communities that have been established using The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) and/or Best Practices Center (BPC) structures and continued for two or more years. Administrators are defined as principals serving in identified schools meeting the definition of sustained PLCs. The theories that guided this study were Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory which focuses on enacting positive change in organizations and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory in relation to motivation through goal setting as a cause for action. These theories are applicable to sustained PLCs since the focus of PLCs, according to DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek. (2010), is sharing a vision based on identified goals.

Significance of the Study

Understanding administrators' experiences in sustaining PLCs is beneficial to develop understanding of how their roles impact PLCs, which may ultimately impact school and student performance. Principals who create environments conducive to shared leadership have demonstrated themselves effective in positively impacting student achievement (Buttram &

Farley-Ripple, 2016; Carpenter, 2015). Exploring the lived experiences of administrators' roles in sustaining PLCs should build upon the base of knowledge of the impact of leadership on creating environments that may enhance student performance. When faculty members trust administrators and each other and perceive administrators to be instructional leaders, achievement of greater academic success is possible (Garza et al., 2014; Gray et al., 2015; Klar & Brewer, 2014; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Learning ways administrators personally perceive their roles in developing trusting environments and being instructional leaders may offer guidance for other administrators seeking to attain these attributes.

Professional learning communities are effective in empowering teachers as leaders and developing teacher knowledge to impact student achievement positively (Hairon, Goh, & Chua, 2015; Lalor & Abawi, 2014; Peppers, 2015; Song, 2012). Hearing the perceptions of administrators may demonstrate ways they employ leadership characteristics that empower teachers and positively affect student attainment. Through transformational leadership, administrators can create a school culture focused on shared goals and encourage faculty members to work towards those goals (Yang, 2014). Exploring administrators' leadership styles may demonstrate that transformational leadership has been employed by participants, or it may show that other leadership methods have been used to sustain that have been impactful in creating environments supportive of collaboration in these organizations. It is hoped that understanding the experiences of administrators in sustaining PLCs will help guide other administrators to successfully utilize PLCs within their schools and develop perspective administrators' knowledge of how to sustain PLCs in future endeavors.

Louisiana has focused on PLC enactment for several years and understanding administrators' perceptions of their roles in PLCs may provide information on how to continue

implementation of the program throughout the state as well as shed insight to areas principals may perceive as hindering PLC success (Louisiana Department of Education, 2015, 2016). This study may add to the body of knowledge for PLCs that will be beneficial for multiple settings in addition to Louisiana because there is a lack of literature exploring administrators' roles in PLCs (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Once identified, administrators completed a survey/questionnaire to acquire descriptive data of the participants' perceptions of PLCs and participated in interviews. Additionally, administrators were asked to participate in a virtual focus group interview where they discussed their experiences with PLCs with each other in relation to questions posed regarding the themes identified in the formal interviews.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1

How do administrators perceive their role in sustaining PLCs in Louisiana schools?

The teachers' experiences and their roles in PLCs have been explored in various studies (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Sjoer & Meirink, 2016; Song, 2012). However, qualitative analysis of administrators' roles in PLCs needs further exploration (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). The perspectives administrators provide in relation to PLCs will further the body of knowledge related to their roles in PLC sustainability.

Research Question 2

What structures do administrators perceive necessary to sustain PLCs?

Shared leadership, trust building, and environments conducive to collaboration have been deemed as beneficial structures for PLCs (Carpenter, 2015; Garza et al., 2014; Gray et al., 2015). Determining the structures administrators feel necessary for PLC sustainability may demonstrate

alignment with structures teachers also see as beneficial in sustaining PLCs, thus supporting the need for these structures to be in place.

Research Question 3

How do administrators support an environment conducive to sustaining PLCs?

Teacher leadership, shared resources and practices, and meaningful engagement in PLCs are important attributes of PLCs (Hairon et al., 2015; Lalor & Abawi, 2014; Owen, 2014). Since PLCs require working towards common goals collaboratively, administrators' support of environments conducive to this type of discourse and teacher empowerment may be advantageous for PLC sustainability.

Research Question 4

What challenges do administrators face in sustaining PLCs?

PLCs too narrowly focused on data may cause the meetings to be ineffective from teachers' perspectives because insignificant time is allotted to needed collaboration for content discussions and meaningful ways to address the needs of students performing on level (Sims & Penny, 2014). Mindfulness of issues administrators face in sustaining PLCs may be beneficial because perhaps others who look to these administrators for guidance may avoid similar pitfalls.

<div align="center">

Definitions

</div>

1. *Best Practices Center* - The Best Practices Center (BPC) is a National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) support system for schools (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching [NIET], n.d.)

2. *Every Student Succeeds Act* - The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is a law established by President Barack Obama in December 2015 as a reauthorization of the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act to better meet the needs of college and career preparation for all students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a).

3. *Louisiana Department of Education* - The Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE) is a state organization that works to establish academic expectations and encourage positive educational outcomes for Louisiana students and educators (Louisiana Department of Education [LDOE], n.d.a.).

4. *No Child Left Behind* - The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is an education act authorized in 2002 by President George W. Bush "[t]o close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind" (NCLB, 2002, para. 1).

5. *National Assessment for Educational Progress* - The National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) is a national assessment developed in 1969 used to assess national academic achievement of students in various subject matter (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009).

6. *National Center for Education Statistics* - The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) is a part of the U.S. Department of Education, NCES "is the primary federal entity for collecting and analyzing data related to education" to fulfill mandated requirements of data collection and analysis (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009, para. 1).

7. *Professional Learning Community* - In a professional learning community (PLC), "educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results of the students they serve" (DuFour et al., 2010, p. 11).

8. *The System for Teacher and Student Advancement* - The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) is "a comprehensive educator effectiveness model that provides powerful opportunities for career advancement, professional growth, instructional focused accountability and competitive compensation for educators" (NIET, n.d., para. 3).

9. *Title I* - Title I is a program that "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" (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.b, para. 2).

Summary

District, school, and individual student success labels are assigned as numerical and letter grades based on students' standardized test performance as sanctioned accountability measures. (ESSA, 2015; LDOE, 1997-2016; NCLB, 2002). Most educators desire to aid students' success, yet lawmakers' attempts to hold schools and educators accountable for student achievement often include ineffective consequences that demoralize educators' efforts (DuFour et al., 2010). Creating school climates focused on collaboration may enhance student and school attainment and aid teachers in better meeting students' needs (Carpenter, 2015; Gray et al., 2015). Historically, Louisiana students have underperformed on NAEP assessments, and since PLCs have been shown to positively impact student achievement, exploration of sustained PLCs in Louisiana schools serves as the basis of this study (NCES, 2015). The problem is that administrators' experiences in sustaining PLCs has been scarcely explored (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016); thus, the purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to explore administrators' lived experiences of their roles in sustaining PLCs in three Southeast Louisiana

school districts. This study is significant to the population being studied because Louisiana has implemented PLCs for several years (Louisiana Department of Education, 2015, 2016), and understanding principals' roles in sustaining PLCs can demonstrate how to maintain structures that have proven successful in various settings (Hairon et al., 2015; Lalor & Abawi, 2014; Peppers, 2015; Song, 2012). Additionally, the information may be applicable in other settings since experiences of principals' roles in sustaining PLCs is lacking (Vanblare & Devos, 2016). I sought to describe ways administrators lead schools to maintain PLCs successfully. Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016) expressed the important role of administrators in PLCs. I learned what measures these administrators employ to sustain PLCs within their schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are one education initiative that has been implemented in various school settings in recent years. The purpose of this literature review is to explore key attributes of effective PLCs and leadership characteristics deemed beneficial for the success of these PLCs. Teachers' perceptions of PLCs have been explored, and different attributes of successful PLCs have been established (Carpenter, 2015; Gray et al., 2015; Peppers, 2015), yet a paucity of research on administrators' roles in PLCs exists (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016). Leadership based on a shared vision and collaborative effort supported by the transformational leadership theory (Burns, 1978) as well as motivation and goal setting of the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) formed the basis for this study. In this literature review, transformational leadership and social learning theory are presented in relation to this study and components of effective PLCs and their impact on teachers and schools are identified. Lastly, leadership characteristics that support PLCs and how these features have been shown to affect PLCs and student achievement are explored.

Theoretical Framework

Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory postulates the idea of working collaboratively as opposed to in isolation for a common goal. Leaders may not lead wholly in the manner that is desired of them because, instead of living up to the challenge of responsibilities, many people are satisfied with being average in their positions of power (Burns, 1978). Organizations employing transformational leadership may positively impact the work environment and productivity (Menges, Walter, Vogel, & Bruch, 2011). Leadership is often misunderstood despite the focus placed upon it (Burns, 1978). Motive and resources are

connected to the main aspects of power, and to comprehend what it means to be a leader, it is necessary to understand power (Burns, 1978). Being in a position of power does not make a person a leader since leaders can hold power but not everyone who is in a position of power can lead (Burns, 1978). Having a leadership position does not guarantee the persons one leads will respect the leader; rather a leader's actions will determine whether he or she can earn the respect of those led (Kouses & Posner, 2012). For principals to be effective in positively impacting school climate and teacher and student performance, schools must be havens for collaboration instead of isolation where teachers, principals, and district personnel work together on a regular basis to improve school performance (Lunenburg & Irby, 2014). It is necessary for school districts to support PLC initiatives so principals have a foundation on which to implement PLCs within their schools (Olivier & Huffman, 2016). The effectiveness of power and leadership is determined by anticipated outcomes coming to fruition (Burns, 1978). Leaders must be willing to confront and grapple with conflict regardless of their leadership assignment (Burns, 1978).

Burns (1978) asserted that transformational leadership seeks to raise moral standards of performance for individuals by addressing a need that motivates followers to action. This moral compass is based on desires and morals of the individuals being lead (Burns, 1978). Leaders must spur action in their followers by encouraging them to take chances since challenges can forge prominence when leaders are willing to make amendments to the norms to enable everyone to reach their fullest potential (Kouses & Posner, 2012). Leadership is demonstrated when individuals come together, against something or someone else, with a common focus and goal to accommodate the followers' expectations (Burns, 1978). Arriving at a common focus requires leaders to explore options that require them to accomplish goals through their actions instead of waiting for things to happen by chance (Kouses & Posner, 2012). Though individuals' interests

may not be common at first, transformational leadership seeks to intertwine individuals' goals into common purposes and elevate the actions and aspirations of the leader and followers (Burns, 1978). Transformational leadership allows principals to inspire educators to create courses of action based on the teacher's personal purpose that permits the teacher's realization of his or her full potential (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). On the contrary, power holders extract resources pertinent to personal motives and those of the persons under their power (Burns, 1978). Transformational leaders who build high levels of trust within their organization may experience greater employee performance, and thus leaders may wish to engage in events that build confidence to avoid miscommunication with staff (Menges et al., 2011). If principals want to create a school climate focused on success for all students and teachers, transformational leadership can help to create an environment that is conducive to situations that can accomplish school goals and support achievement (Printy, Marks, & Bowers, 2009).

Further reinforcing a collaborative learning structure is Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which supports individuals working together for the common benefits of all parties for desired outcomes and guided this research study. Bandura (1977) expressed that knowledge acquisition would be very difficult without learning from one another through observation of others and thus developing behaviors by following this guidance instead of solely relying on one's own actions aids in knowledge acquisition. Individuals who base goals on personal endeavors create a plan for what to strive for and thus work towards attainment until the effort exerted coincides with the desired results (Bandura, 1988). A three-year study of 116 teachers in elementary science PLCs in two California school districts demonstrated an increase in teacher self-efficacy in relation to PLC implementation (Mintzes, Marcum, Messershmidt-Yates, & Mark, 2013). For success to be achieved, individuals must demonstrate self-efficacy and strive

to overcome life's difficulties (Bandura, 1995). Teachers who believe in their own abilities more easily implement differentiated instruction to meet students' needs and are more willing to strive to find methods that work when others prove unsuccessful (De Neve, Devos, & Tuytens, 2015). When working to attain set goals, individuals who view failure as a byproduct of their lack of effort are more likely to persevere in trying to improve their industry while persons who perceive their failure to be a result of inability may relax their energies and become disheartened (Bandura, 1997). PLCs that are not structured properly to encourage effective collaboration may not afford the necessary components on which social learning theory is based (Thacker, 2017). However, individuals who believe hard work garners success through persistent effort tend to be motivated by accomplishments of exercised endeavors (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura's social learning theory suggests that motivation can be conditioned through external sources (Bandura, 1977). Motivation imparts a reason for why persons begin and continue actions (Bandura, 1977). Within goal setting persons are self-motivated, employ foresight, and anticipate probable results to develop objectives and plans that will allow them to attain their desired future endeavors (Bandura, 1988). Persons who exhibit confidence in their problem-solving abilities are efficient, analytical thinkers who make complex decisions that manifest in action-based achievements (Bandura, 1997). Individuals who create specific goals, become frustrated when their actions are not coordinated to reach those established goals, and thus become motivated to make the necessary changes to attain the desired level of achievement (Bandura, 1977). Persons must be forward thinking, self-regulated, motivated individuals who do not develop a plan and wait for things to happen but intentionally choose to be motivated and carry out the actions to the desired results through self-reliance (Bandura, 2001).

Related Literature

Effective leadership promotes positive teacher and student performance (Garza et al., 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Klar & Brewer, 2014). Principals need to be formally prepared for the task if successful principal leadership is to be encouraged (Garza et al., 2014). Garza et al. (2014) expressed that effective leaders possess temperaments based in social justice, compassion, morality, ethics, resilience, persistence, and courage. Garza et al. (2014) also recommended principals work on empowering teacher leaders to enact distributed leadership. Greater expectations have been placed on school leaders and educators with requirements being demanded mandating teachers educate every child to rigorous standards despite academic cavities that persist, and these requirements must be accomplished with fewer resources (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Therefore, leaders must support teachers and employ distributed leadership to encourage collaboration that will work in school settings (Carpenter, 2015). With focus on assessment-based outcomes at the forefront of education today, PLCs can allow necessary changes to support enhanced student achievement while still supporting the current hierarchy (Chen & Mitchell, 2015).

When school performance is lower than required expectations, directive leadership is sometimes employed in an effort to encourage measurable improvement; however, this directive leadership, which may involve placing teachers on intensive assistance plans or terminating underperforming individuals, does not create a supportive environment conducive to trust and collaboration (Bennett et al., 2013). Hitt and Tucker (2016) suggested that prinicpals function more as a catalyst for educator development than a supervisor of teacher technique. Principals should become lead learners as they engage in and then develop professional learning opportunities that encourage teachers to keep student learning and engagement at the forefront of

lesson planning and instruction through observation and providing specific feedback on student

engagement in the classroom setting (Hindmann, Rozelle, Ball, & Fahey, 2015). The

collaborative nature of professional learning communities (PLCs) may drive principals to enact

distributive leadership and support teacher's engagement in unprompted learning and research

(Chen & Mitchell, 2015).

Researchers suggest schools with successful PLC implementation serve as models for

future principals where the current successful principals can train newcomers and that successful

principals should be assigned to higher need schools (Garza et al., 2014). Positive working

relationships can be built between principals and teachers through development of a shared

vision with a common commitment to work toward attainment of established goals (Hitt &

Tucker, 2016). Effective principals must be more than mere facilitators but active instructional

leaders who value teachers' contributions to cultivate aspiration for teachers to welcome

innovation (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). School leaders need to immerse themselves in instructional

opportunities that are conducive to building their knowledge bases to support academic

achievement and enhanced teacher performance (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Employment

preparation programs that focus on social behaviors, longer placements for principals, and

screening processes for principals may aid in securing principals with these desired leadership

characteristics (Garza et al., 2014). Klar and Brewer (2014) concluded that principals should not

only learn about leadership techniques but should also be able to utilize them within their school

and community settings.

Professional Development and Teacher Performance

Professional a development can serve as a valuable forum for teachers to garner

necessary skills to address students' needs; accordingly, in a digitally-literate society where

educators are responsible for their knowledge and methods, governments are endeavoring to

regulate systems that postulate elevated professional talent (Lowrie, 2014). Professional

development is more than just content and should encourage teacher collaboration to enhance

teacher efficacy and impact student achievement (Lalor & Abawi, 2014; Kennedy, 2016a.).

Lalor and Abawi (2014) explored teachers' experiences with professional learning communities

(PLCs) and noted PLCs are beneficial in teacher knowledge sharing and making students the

primary focus. However, teachers' beliefs about PLCs can impact their engagement in and

collaboration measures within the groupings; thus, working with teachers to develop a positive

outlook regarding PLCs is important if true teacher development is to take place (Tam, 2015).

PLCs may help educators distinguish which instructional practices are best utilized and

understand how these practices may impact student achievement (Brendefur, Whitney, Steward,

Pfiester, & Zarbinisky, 2014).

        Helping new teachers understand the issues they may face, and gain knowledge is

advantageous, but teachers need to be encouraged to analytically think about the issues they are

facing and their occurrence within the classroom setting to develop plans of action (Kennedy,

2016b.). Discussing resources and instructional practices with fellow teachers, setting time-

sensitive learning goals, and supporting teachers, especially new ones, are important aspects of

PLCs (Lalor & Abawi, 2014). Dillard (2016) noted that, teacher preparation programs should

allow education students to interact and collaborate with their classmates in a fashion similar to

the collaborative nature of PLCs for new educators to become knowledgeable of PLC structures

and to learn how to work towards a shared vision for student success. Hence, when later hired as

educators, they may even seek out individuals with whom they can collaborate when PLCs are

not present in their employing districts (Dillard, 2016). Continual professional development can

have a positive impact on educational quality and alignment to expectations for student

performance, which is beneficial because student and school improvement should be essential

goals of academic settings (Wang, 2016). Professional development can build teacher quality

and support retention of teachers with measures such as an open learning culture where educators

and prinicpals work together. This can enhance learning and sustainibilty of the knowledge

gained through the provided trainings (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Zijlstra, & Volman, 2017).

However, programs focused solely on content knowledge are less successful than ones

that encourage teachers to develop students' thinking skills (Kennedy, 2016a). PLC facilitators

should provide literacy teachers engagement with videos that address students' needs and

demonstrate practices that should be implemented in the classroom. Teachers who view videos

on topics related to student needs may be more apt to apply that learning in the classroom setting

(Christ, Arya, & Chiu, 2017). In a study of 1739 teachers in 408 PLCs from 28 primary and 28

secondary schools, highly-engaged learning teams strongly endorsed collaborative learning as

important in PLCs with a focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, and shared values and

vision following. Moderately-engaged learning teams strongly endorsed focus on student

learning as ranking higher than other engagement measures (Ning, Lee, & Lee, 2016). According

to Ning et al. (2016), learning teams who exhibit autonomy and pursue organization, structures,

and community support are more likely to engage in PLC activities. Both leaders and teachers

desire to work in districts where PLCs have been implemented because they appreciate the

collaborative process (Woodland, 2016).

An additional component of PLC facilitation in some districts, coaching can be

advantageous in PLCs. Coaches in one professional development school district worked

together to identify their roles in supporting teachers by interacting and planning with the

classroom teachers to implement the teachers' visions instead of telling teachers what or how to instruct students (Corkery et al., 2015). Educators need to work to engage collaboratively to focus professional development on student achievement measures (Kennedy, 2016a). Teachers often solicit advice from individuals within the school setting with whom they already have solid professional relationships. Whether their advice groups contain veteran or novice educators, nonetheless, these relationships among educators are integral to the dispersion of academic changes (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). When coaches are assigned to a teacher by a principal without common liability, teachers may feel that the coaching is punitive and therefore be reluctant to engage with the coach to develop measures that can increase teacher and student success. Thus, an approach that shares vulnerability with dialogue among the principal, teacher, and instructional coach can lead to greater learning (Corkery et al., 2015).

School leaders need to create an environment within the school organization that establishes expectations and encourages collaboration through trust-building and mutual goals to build positive relationships in an effort to harvest available expertise from all school personnel (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Often the role of an instructional coach is one of a good listener who allows teachers who are experiencing difficulty to express concerns and self-reflect on situations that are troublesome through collaborative discourse with the coach (Corkery et al., 2015). Interaction between educators within a school setting often sets the tone for information dissemination throughout the school; therefore, understanding the nature of the relationships within the organization may provide opportunity to enhance student and teacher achievement and encourage transformation of the way information is exchanged and utilized within the schools (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Coaching can be an asset to professional development when implementation of coaches is handled properly (Kennedy, 2016a). Kennedy (2016a) suggested

that, like the popularity of coaches, PLCs are often implemented today to promote positive education-focused interactions, yet, the focus must be more about content of discussions and academic work addressed within the PLCs than the PLC itself.

Often professional development is directed to classroom teachers instead of school leaders, which may not allow leaders to develop a thorough understanding of the reform initiatives (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Persons in leadership positions such as literacy and math coaches and principals are commonly approached for advice; thus, these leadership roles become vital components of the school that work towards the development of the entire educational body (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Superintendents should provide opportunities for all district stakeholders, teachers, staff, and administrators to work collaboratively to support a district-wide vision based on data that identifies strengths and weaknesses of the schools within in addition to modeling expectations and encouraging PLC implementation (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013). Districts that support common collaboration time may increase teacher and student performance, yet, the way in which educators utilize data to inform instructional decisions and how support personnel are employed often differ by school thus impacting the overall success of the collaborative efforts (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2014). Successful educational systems in any country can only excel if they are grounded in inclusion of all stakeholders connected to students learning (Lowrie, 2014). Therefore, schools should seek to include all stakeholders in discussions regarding significant decisions on school policy in effort to build a positive school culture focused on success for all students (Svanbjörnsdóttir, Macdonald, & Frímannsson, 2016).

Professional Learning Communities and Teacher Empowerment

Teacher empowerment is supported when teachers engage in discussion that minimizes

conflict, enhances common understanding, and creates new learning and teamwork (Sompong, Erawan, & Dharm-tad-sa-na-non, 2015). When teachers are chosen to lead under the supportive guidance of literacy coaches and principals, teachers may see positive results in their classrooms and be willing to work to assist colleagues in developing similar success (Lent & Voigt, 2014). Sometimes individual educators can serve as liaisons between leadership personnel and other teachers by not only seeking but providing advice. This increases the efficacy of coaches and administrators by creating indirect relationships between teachers and leadership team members and building capacity for successful dissemination of information (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Permitting teachers' choices of professional development opportunities on topics that they are passionate about as well provision of choices of with whom they will work can be empowering (Corkery et al., 2015). Teacher leadership in PLCs extends further than just merely facilitating conversations among educators but requires creating meaningful engagement in activities that encourage teacher development and purposeful learning (Salleh, 2016).

The interconnectedness of PLCs and distributed leadership allows teachers to modify instructional practice in ways that enhance student performance and maintain teacher well being (Owen, 2016). Teachers can interact with various pedagogical strategies, enhance content understanding, and self-reflect on practices within their classrooms as well as engage in reflective discussions with fellow educators (Scott, Clarkson, McDonough, 2011). One way teachers may utilize PLCs to enhance student achievement is to use self-reflective methods to determine strategies they could have implemented that may have had a greater impact on student mastery of the objectives and then engage in collegial observations, tracking, and discussions on the identified strategies to assess their impact on student learning (Wasta, 2017). In small school settings, PLCs can increase teacher efficacy because while large teams of experienced educators

may not be available, the collaborative nature of PLCs works to allow teachers to hone their craft and enhance their instructional independence by accessing colleagues within their personal school environment (Edwards, 2012). Distributed leadership allows school administrators to utilize teacher leaders to make decisions regarding instructional leadership and curriculum that may positively impact student performance (Salleh, 2016).

Professional development is an integral component in building teacher leadership capable of supporting educators in being innovative, knowledgeable individuals who can advance their leadership abilities to positively impact school personnel and policies (Frost, 2012). In some school districts across the country, programs piloting teacher leadership governing entire schools has been successful since teacher autonomy enhances the way teachers instruct and lead. Thus, this improves student performance because teachers are not told what they must do but are being allowed to modify instructional practice to meet the needs of the students under their leadership (Farris-Berg, 2014). Effective leadership is an integral component of sustained professional development, and teachers appreciate having their ideas acknowledged and utilized within school organizations (Gaikhorst et al., 2017). When teachers are placed not in the role of teacher but also allowed to lead, their perspective may shift because of the duality of the roles, and deeper, more substantial facilitation of PLCs may result from this structure (Charner-Laird, Ippolito, & Dobbs, 2016). Reflective dialogue may have an impact on teachers implementing differentiated instruction more readily in their classrooms due to the exchange of information among educators related to differentiated approaches (De Neve et al., 2015). Reciprocal discussion on instructional methods may encourage educators to learn from one another and enhance innovative teaching techniques and modification of teaching approaches (Sompong et al., 2015). Having a guideline such as a rubric for analyzing instructional techniques and student work can

encourage greater comprehension of what should be modified during instruction thus enhancing the groups' collaboration measures and enabling the revision of future instructional plans (Brendefur et al., 2014).

In a traditional school setting, principals are responsible for many educators contained within, and leading those individuals effectively can be difficult for one person (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Principals are the primary force in creating PLCs and establishing how they function (Murphy & Lick, 2005). School leaders need to understand that the greatest impact on student achievement can be obtained by having quality teachers; therefore, developing a school climate that supports teacher efficacy is vital to school success (Pont, 2014). Creating smaller groups of multiple teachers focused on similar goals allows principals to engage more effectively with these small groups of educators as a successful leader instead of a mere manager (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Teacher leader development can be more impactful when circumstances empower teachers to analyze these collaborative systems and understand their role within these structures. Then, educators can hone necessary skills for their practice through development of trusting, communal, partnerships that are essential to teacher excellence (Baker-Doyle, 2015). PLC quality is dependent upon leadership that creates educators and principals who are willing to believe in and try things that they have never attempted and to develop deeper comprehension (Sparks, 2005). Individuals within PLCs are called to work with one another to pursue a shared vision for school achievement by supporting each other in necessary endeavors that will enhance their professional knowledge and positively impact their teaching performance to meet students' needs (Eaker, DuFour, DuFour, 2002). Principals serve a key role in empowering teachers, which in turn significantly impacts student achievement. However, principals are not solely responsible for student achievement but should instead support collaboration that builds quality

teachers who can successfully address student needs by collaborating effectively with colleagues toward a common focus on student learning performance (Wilson, 2016).

Principals can structure teams to encourage the implementation of desired practices by utilizing teacher leaders to promote goals, analyzing existing teams within the school setting, and strategically rearranging them to meet the anticipated expectations. Then, specific training can be offered to these individuals who will distribute the information to the school population (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Teacher leaders need to be flexible, optimistic, risk-takers who exhibit good communication skills, have colleagues' respect, are open-minded, and are focused on student learning (Lent & Voigt, 2014). These groups can be comprised of individuals who are typically outgoing and willingly share with others, or principals can tap the potential of more introverted educators by allowing those teachers opportunities to learn and share information within a smaller setting (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Educators who work with fellow teachers to explore pedagogy and develop a deeper understanding through reflective practice can create positive professional relationships that broaden professional knowledge through exploration of one another's journey (Scott et al., 2011). Instructional and distributed leadership can help sustain PLCs because teachers who bond with colleagues and share responsibility may feel empowered (Wang, 2016).

Schools employing measures that encourage sustained PLCs include collaboration on the school's student-centered mission and vision. This are focused on student learning with data as the basis for decision-making and the creation of a supportive environment that enables teamwork to flourish with student learning as its central objective (Abrego & Pankake, 2011). Consequently, collaboration measures are dependent upon the vision of the school and what the desired outcome is, which usually means some type of desired improvement for the school

setting. However, if focus simply permits educators to do the same things just improved, the

likelihood of significant change may be diminished (Lavié, 2006). PLCs focused on assessment

are more impactful in building teacher knowledge than instructional meetings focused on simply

describing what occurred during lesson instruction, yet, shifting the focus of instructional

meetings to analyze the relationship between instruction and learning may allow more

opportunities for teachers to learn from one another (Popp & Goldman, 2016).

Through analysis of PLCs in Singapore and Shanghai, Hairon and Tan (2017) concluded

that evaluation of teachers' participation in PLCs may be beneficial in helping establish the

importance of PLC expectations because an evaluation like classroom evaluations may express

the importance of the PLC activities to teachers participating in them. On the other hand, Lee

and Kim's (2016) study in Korea concluded that the quality of PLCs should be more important

than the quantity and that participation in PLCs. In addition, Lee and Kim (2016) concluded that

PLCs should not be obligatory because teachers may view participation as another responsibility.

Thus, since the potential benefit of self-motivated teachers possibly experiencing collaboration

that is be impactful, structures that assist teacher participation may be more effective than

mandating participation. Sustainability of PLCs depends upon teachers being convinced that

activities contained within will positively impact classroom success and student learning (Hairon

& Tan, 2017). Teachers should engage in formal and informal educational discussions and

classroom observations as well as conversations that are supportive of differing opinions to

increase teacher knowledge without too much hierarchy (Jäppinen, Leclerc, & Tubin, 2016).

Conversations supportive of learning are essential to impact teacher practices and student

learning; hence conversations should be more structure instead of leaving them to chance

(Salleh, 2016). PLC discussions should center on building content knowledge which can

improve teacher practice in the classroom (Hairon & Tan, 2017).

Sustained PLC Constructs

An analysis by six international researchers noted global PLC constructs, definitions, and descriptors for PLCs implemented in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and the USA (Huffman et al., 2016). The Global PLC constructs, definitions, and descriptors for PLCs are: organizational structures, policies and procedure, leadership, professionalism, learning capacity, and sense of community (Huffman et al., 2016). Similarly, four important areas noted of PLC formation and sustainability in a Taiwanese study are supportive and shared leadership, shared values and vision, collegial trust, and shared personal practice (Chen, Lee, Zin, & Zhang, 2016). Likewise, meaningful practices of PLCs in Chinese schools include collaborative learning, professional competency, facilitative leadership, structural support, and organizational barriers (Zhang & Pang, 2016). Organizational descriptors include time, policies, and procedures, which have been distinguished as significant factors of PLCs (Hairon & Tan, 2017, Huffman et al., 2016; Jäppinen et al., 2016; Zhang, Yuan, & Yu, 2017). Allocation of adequate time is a large concern for implementing and sustaining PLCs, and it is necessary to build sufficient time allotments within the work day to avoid taxing teachers with a heavier burden (Hairon & Tan, 2017; Huffman et al., 2016; Jäppinen et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2017). Yet, simply changing the structure of when PLCs occur will not encourage teacher participation. Thus, a school culture focused on collaboration and openness among educators who willingly invite and welcome fellow educators into their classrooms and actively engage in academic discourse will likely experience greater success (Lee & Kim, 2016). Authentic school improvement requires time to develop, and leadership should be shared among teachers and administrators so that individuals best versed and interested in certain areas can passionately

carryout the responsibilities they have been apportioned (Jäppinen et. al., 2016).

Leadership descriptors of learning for all and establishing a shared vision are also necessary for PLC implementation and sustainability (Chen et al., 2016; Hairon & Tan, 2017; Huffman et al., 2016; Sun-Kueng Pang, Wang, & Lai-Mei Leung, 2016). Leaders must facilitate decision making within the school and respect teachers input by engaging in mutual consultation in various matters and allowing teachers autonomy in some meetings free from administrator presence (Jäppinen et al., 2016). Supportive and shared leadership and shared vision through building collegial trust positively impacts shared teacher practices; thus, collegiality is a critical component of PLCs for blending shared leadership with shared visions and practices (Chen et al., 2016). In Hong Kong, schools with strong PLCs as determined through quantitative surveys and rating subscales measuring leadership for teacher learning, collaborative learning capacity, student-focused orientation, culture of sharing, continuous professional development, and mutual understanding and support had strong support of leadership for professional learning and sharing ideas as well as a clear vision of student needs (Sun-Kueng Pang et al., 2016). In addition to principal leadership, teacher leadership coincides with instructional leadership to build quality teaching and learning aligned to school goals (Salleh, 2016). Shared leadership can allow teachers to serve as critical innovators in curriculum and instruction efforts, and principals should encourage teachers to take leadership roles because of the impact it can have on their schools (Wang, 2016).

Additionally, the sense of community descriptors which include trust and respect and collegial influence are equally essential components of PLCs (Chen et al., 2016; Huffman et al., 2016; Jäppinen et al., 2016). Collegial trust was deemed an essential PLC component and "effective communication, reciprocal relations, collaborative cultures of learning, and

recognition of colleague achievement were all significantly and positively related to the shared practices of teachers" (Chen et al., 2016, p. 206). Trust and care are key attributes of developing a collegial school environment where individuals respect one another, and the administration supports involvement by all members of the school community in providing input and sharing accountability (Jäppinen et al., 2016). Consequently, in the absence of trust and collaboration, the probability of administrators enacting and carrying out a common vision is likely to be futile (Chen et al., 2016). Collegiality and trust may not be viewed as indispensable parts of PLCs by some, but these are characteristic of building strong learning communities focused on student learning (Salleh, 2016). The effect of strong collegiality may be due to increased autonomy of teachers and the minimized pressure of accountability measures (Chen et al., 2016).

Professional Learning Communities' Impact in Schools

Since studies of PLCs have been undertaken in various locations, it is of interest that an international comparison of PLCs in Beijing and Ontario noted the positive influence of PLCs on principals. Thus, this demonstrated the applicability of PLCs in diverse educational backgrounds (Chen & Mitchell, 2015). Additionally, Dogan, Pringle, and Mesa (2016) analyzed 14 articles from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and Bangladesh regarding the impact of PLCs on science teachers' knowledge, practice, and student learning and discovered that PLCs were noted to build science teachers' content knowledge, and teachers reported that, after initial hesitation due to shyness, PLCs helped improve their teaching practice. Likewise, an analysis of multiple studies from 1982-2009 evaluating the connection between PLCs and student achievement demonstrated PLCs positively impact student achievement (Lomos, Hofmann, & Bosker, 2011). Also, the focus on data allows response to intervention (RTI) leadership team PLCs to support intervention measures through analysis of various data sources that can address

student deficits. The collaborative nature of PLCs supports educators working towards a common vison for all student learning within the school environment (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). On the other hand, strategies such as incentive pay in underperforming districts work on the premise that teachers are capable of providing superior instruction to their students but are unmotivated and instead provided an inferior education; however, this issue lies in the historically noncollaborative nature of school systems. Thus, focus should not be on consequences for educators but instead professional development that builds capacity to enhance teacher and student performance (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

In this regard, for PLCs to be effective, the school culture must be one that is supportive of collaborative efforts and shared vision (Carpenter, 2015; Gray et al., 2015). With the implementation of PLCs being vast for educators, a recent study explored the use of PLCs for students and teachers and concluded that teachers and students working together in PLCs can enhance learning (Wennergren & Blossing, 2017). Overarching goals providing a common focus on vision and expectations regarding data use should be developed and disseminated from the district leadership to school leadership and then to teachers. In addition, continued training and monitoring of data usage as well as access to persons well-versed in data analysis within the district should be accessible to schools and teacher leaders in order to facilitate knowledge of how to effectively use data to impact instruction (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2014). Nonetheless, shared purpose and values are not enough to sustain PLC efforts if teachers do not successfully utilize student data to impact their academic performance (Carpenter, 2015). Once districts establish a clear vision for the schools contained within, it is imperative that school leaders provide teachers with requirements for achieving the desired vision by creating an environment that supports shared responsibility and mutual exploration of data for the entire school to

determine areas of strengths and weakness and enhance understanding of teachers' and students' performance (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2014).

Collaboration is key to successfully creating a positive school culture and establishing effective PLCs (Carpenter, 2015). Collaboration efficacy should promote continued improvement and teacher empowerment, leading to higher student performance (Carpenter, 2015). One way PLCs can work to develop common goals and action plans is when one educator uses his or her teaching methods as a model for other teachers to reflect upon and then utilize the method within his or her classroom to bring back for reflection in the next collaboration meeting (Scott et al., 2011). Shared leadership is key to collaborative, professional learning through development of shared goals that are outcome-driven to reach specified objectives (Carpenter, 2015). Gray et al. (2015) concluded that enabling school structures, collegial trust, and academic emphasis had significant correlations with PLCs. In addition, the promotion of structures that encourage collaboration and attentiveness to students' educational performance lies in the principal's proficiency at cultivating these situations and influences. While principals should encourage these structures within the school setting, it is important to note that even though PLCs can create an environment that supports individual teachers and the school, variations between urban and rural districts may exist with rural districts experiencing more teacher isolation (Wang et al., 2017).

Consequently, network teams are essential in the facilitation of sharing data and vital in the metamorphosis of teacher practice (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Video clips of classroom activities can provide a springboard for in-depth discussions on best practices and afford collaboration meetings a clear focus (Brendefur et al., 2014; Scott et al., 2011). Additionally, videos are resources that can be utilized in PLCs to allow teachers to develop and

apply relevant instructional practices that impact student learning. Therefore, adding videos of best practices for educators to view and the apply in the classroom setting may be a component that should be added to PLCs to not only enhance professional development of educators but to make a greater impact on student learning (Christ et al., 2017). Similarly, observations of educators within the school can provide topics for focused conversation about instructional practices observed in the classroom setting as related to a genuine, instructional connection where educators within the school, as well as coaches and administrators, can observe lessons free of judgment for discussion and learning purposes and then collaboratively debrief. This provides a way to maintain a school-wide focus on specifically observed learning techniques (Visone, 2016). PLCs provide opportunities for teachers to bolster one another within the school setting instead of having to seek assistance from external resources in effort to hone teaching abilities and address student needs (Sompong et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, individuals who are sought for advice do not necessarily deem themselves more qualified than the seeker, and some even identify with still needing to learn more on the topics themselves. Therefore, this highlights the idea that working within a support network may constrain the expertise that is available to those seeking assistance within the organization (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). While PLCs are structures within a school community that allow for exchange of ideas within the organization, it is important to remember that the development of learning communities includes collaboration with external persons in addition to individuals within specific settings (Sompong et al., 2015). Educators working together to identify problems may benefit from entertaining students' ideas because the attention given to students' viewpoints may augment teacher practice where educators provide more student-centered instruction based on students' beliefs and thus generate greater student learning (Tan &

Caleon, 2016). The structure of PLCs allows educators to shift their pedagogical thinking in a way that encourages them to be the best professionals possible through the creation of industrious learning environments where all students can fulfill their learning potential (Feldman, 2016).

DuFour shared an experience of becoming a new principal and guiding the faculty to the idea of establishing PLCs by exposing personnel to a training on PLCs and letting the faculty members engage in conversation with fellow educators about establishing PLCs within their school (Eaker, 2011). Sometimes new administrators believe that revamping the faculty and staff may positively impact the school environment; however, simply terminating some individuals is unlikely to create long-term, lasting effects that significantly impact student performance within the school (Bennett et al., 2013). Performance within the school setting should be transparent, and colleagues should be free to observe one another in an effort to learn and improve each other's practice and address diverse student needs under the oversight of principals who maintains focus on school goals (Jäppinen et al., 2016). When schools work collaboratively to focus on specific goals that can be measured, schools can experience success through PLC efforts in the form of increased achievement (Eaker et al., 2002). The establishment and sustainment of PLCs can increase school performance with measurable success of student attainment (Abrego & Pankake, 2011; Lomos et al., 2011). Successful PLCs never lose focus that the primary goal is student learning and therefore produce items that maintain that focus on a weekly basis to positively impact student feats (Eaker et al., 2002). It is important to recognize student and teacher learning and involve parents in the process of school improvement through engagement in more frequent celebrations of short-term victories (Eaker et al., 2002).

Principals Should Support PLC Structures, Collegiality, and Collaboration

Chen & Mitchell (2015) concluded that principals can attack the challenges faced in their school through the implementation of PLC structures within their school setting. Yet, simply mandating schools develop and implement PLCs is inadequate to produce purposeful collaboration among educators or improve student achievement due to the variance in execution of the PLC structures (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2014). According to Baker-Doyle (2015), "When we acknowledge how the school environment impacts teacher quality, we cannot justify exclusively blaming individuals. Instead, it forces us to reconceptualize how we can improve teacher quality" (p. 380). Making expectations clear through use of specific learning objectives that are aligned with standards and setting measurable goals for student achievement will assist students in reaching their full ability levels (Pont, 2014). Principals need to support a school culture that not only has high expectations but also encourages collaboration with ongoing professional development to expand teacher knowledge and provide the necessary resources to accomplish these goals (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). However, if all members of the instructional team do not employ a unified grasp of PLC best practices, this constructive collaboration time may be underutilized and squandered (Spencer, 2016). Creating trusting, collaborative environments focused on a common vision where school leaders support the endeavors of professional learners encourages educator discourse and collegial learning that shapes teacher mindsets and classroom application (Owen, 2016).

Nevertheless, Buttram and Farley-Ripple (2016) demonstrated principals' influence on teacher learning in PLCs is seldom explicit. Instead of direct influence in the acquisition of knowledge, the personnel principals select to engage in PLCs, timeframes of that participation, and support systems put in place build an environment conducive to collaboration (Buttram &

Farley-Ripple, 2016). Therefore, teacher leadership can build collegial and collaborative relations, promote teacher learning and development, and enable change in teachers' teaching practices (Hairon et al., 2015; Owen, 2014; Visone, 2016). Since collaborative groups promote the sharing of knowledge, both positive and negative information can be transmitted through these groupings; thus, it is important for school leaders to be cognizant of the efforts undertaken in these collaborative endeavors (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). It is also important for principals to be aware that varying levels of trust may encumber the ability to create distributive leadership within their schools (Bennett et al., 2013). Principals should be clear that the primary focus of the school is student learning and all efforts from classroom instruction to PLC content should function with that goal at the forefront (Eaker et al., 2002). Owen (2016) noted that PLCs should be more than individuals working together in a group but should be an environment conducive to purposeful and meaningful engagement in challenging one another to be exceedingly competent in knowledge acquisition. Principals need to understand the potential of PLCs and encourage faculty participation to increase PLC value (Lee & Kim, 2016).

Principals can create a school culture focused on change by affording time in the schedule for collaboration, having clear expectations for collaboration meetings and data analysis, being a model communicator and decision-maker, sharing data within and among school grade-levels, having specialists support PLCs, and being present and examining PLC production often (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). Support of school leaders in establishing protected time for educators to collaborate and engage in data analysis can be enhanced by strategically creating groups of individuals who engage more effectively with one another and by providing additional support in the form of specialists to the groups who are struggling to provide models that demonstrate how to effectively analyze and utilize data and engage in

discussions on the value of collaboration work in positively impacting student achievement

(Farley-Ripple & Buttrum, 2014). Learning communities must foster reflective practice with

conversation based on teaching, learning, and student performance aligned to best pedagogical

practices (Brendefur et al., 2014). In years past, researchers did not identify a relationship

between principal leadership and student attainment; however, more recently, research has

demonstrated a positive correlation between principal leadership and student achievement

(DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Concentrating on what others deem necessary instead of personal interests allows leaders

to build trusting relationships with those whom they lead (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Thus,

principals should be aware of what teachers within the school setting desire to accomplish by

determining the specific needs of those employed to build trusting relationships with employees.

Analysis of collaborative groups by educational leaders can distinguish individuals who often

engage in providing data guidance, identify teachers who discuss data collaboratively, and note

those who remain in isolation (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). PLC facilitators need to

intentionally plan for roles to engage teachers in focused collaboration that will support

teamwork (Hairon et al., 2015). Additionally, providing training for teachers and coaching can

support teachers' further development of knowledge and instructional practice (Buttram &

Farley-Ripple, 2016). By evaluating personal performance, using data, and collaborating on

instructional plans during assigned times, teachers who have administrator support can modify

their lesson planning by establishing small goals and developing trusting relationships with

individuals with whom they collaborate (Brendefur et al., 2014). Hairon et al. (2015) concluded

that teacher leadership supports PLCs in a substantial way by building collegial and collaborative

relationships, promoting teacher learning and development, and enabling teachers to modify

teaching habits.

Principals' Responsibility in PLCs

If PLCs are to have a positive impact on the school environment and successfully enhance student achievement, it is crucial that principals identify, share, and execute effective components of PLCs to continue their maintenance (Wilson, 2016). Of the responsibilities principals must maneuver, PLCs help to condense those tasks by consolidating them into one structured process that supports common goals, communication, and engagement with instructional practice and student learning (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) "assert[ed] principals of PLCs must: 1) Be clear about their primary responsibility.; 2) Disperse leadership throughout the school.; 3) Bring coherence to the complexities of schooling by aligning the structure *and* culture of the school with its core purpose" (p. 308). Focusing on data, engaging parents, implementing behavior expectations, and budgeting for curriculum needs have been shown to be ways that principals can increase their impact on student achievement (Brown, 2016).

Likewise, in effort to lead in a way that encourages positive change, leaders need to foster experiences that allow discussions of varying viewpoints and ideas while respecting one another's differing opinions, therefore paving the way for open-mindedness and collaboration that can lead to greater instruction, learning, and relationships (Sparks, 2005). When asking principals to determine their primary responsibility, principals should view their job as developing a school culture that encourages adult learning and collective accountability for supporting learning for all students to attain skills necessary to be productive (DuFour et al., 2008). In school settings where principals embrace the PLC structure, schools see a much greater impact on the efficacy of the meetings than in schools where principals offer little or no

guidance or input regarding the PLCs or where the principals require teachers to engage in activities that are not instructionally focused (Thessin, 2015). Neither teachers nor principals should work in isolation to support learning within a school setting, and PLCs work in contrast to seclusion by encouraging all members of a school's educational team to work in conjunction with one another for the common goal of educating students (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Student needs must be identified through data analysis and serve as the basis for collaboration where best practices can be outlined and utilized by educators with principals and teachers working for common goals together instead of alone (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Principals may be more effective by focusing on teaching and learning instead of simply supervising teachers in hopes of encouraging better performance. Thus, creating collaborative working environments based on student outcomes may be a better way to address this goal, which may build leadership within the teams (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). In schools where principals were trained in what student engagement should look like in a classroom and teachers were aware of these expectations, , these schools saw increases in high quality engagement over the course of several years (Hindmann et al., 2015).

Shared leadership encourages capacity building that creates multiples school leaders under the direction of the principal (DuFour et al., 2008). It is not necessary for the principal to be the sole leader within the school because situational leadership can be employed when, in addition to an overarching leadership team, assignments of leadership roles to individuals in specific subjects or grade-levels can support shared leadership based on each one's strength (DuFour et al., 2008). DuFour and Marzano (2011) suggested that "Principals do indeed 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 educators who serve those students through the PLC

process" (p. 63). Relationship building is critical for principals who desire to develop a professional learning school environment, and relationships can be fostered when principals express genuine concern for what teachers deem important by soliciting feedback from teachers to become a more effective school leader (Cherkowski, 2016).

Hindrances to PLC Efficacy

Zhang, Yuan, and Yu (2017) concluded that school leaders and teachers in China agreed that insufficient collaboration time, a system focused on high-stakes accountability, and a competitive instead of collaborative culture were impediments of PLCs. If time allotted to PLCs is lacking and administrators are not actively engaged in collaboration, it is more difficult to achieve school objectives (Sims & Penny, 2014). In Zhang et al.'s (2017) study, teachers expressed that time for collaboration was limited and other duties such as grading and teaching left little time to work with fellow educators. In addition, leaders stated that more collaboration time and fewer duties were impossible to provide for teachers due to lack of funding (Zhang et al., 2017). Effective PLCs are led by individuals who prioritize time and engage community members and other stakeholders in meaningful encounters within the school (Eaker et al., 2002). Developing activities that include parents and the community but do not align with the school goals may not involve all stakeholders in a valid way to champion the schools purpose or develop understanding of data in an authentic, democratic manner (Bennett et al., 2013). Issues with communication also can be a downfall in sustaining PLCs (Abrego & Pankake, 2011); communication is a critical aspect of PLCs (Sims & Penny, 2014).

A narrow concentration on data and underperforming students may prevent needed exploration of general pedagogy to increase teacher content knowledge (Sims & Penny, 2014). Data that should be explored in PLCs is that of teacher-created common formative assessments

that measure learning based on instruction taught within the school where they are created, and the data retrieved from those assessments should be used to make decisions regarding students' needs for intervention that supports mastery of those objectives (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Another issue that may arise with data in PLCs is that teachers examine and identify student needs and determine what the students need to do be master the skills without examining their own practice to see what they could have done to have a greater impact on student mastery of the objectives (Wasta, 2017). However, if performance of teachers is tied to testing accountability measures, teachers may be less willing to share successful techniques with one another but instead consider those measures their "individual intellectual property," which can create the climate of competition instead of collaboration (Zhang et al., 2017, p. 227). Likewise, if interaction in PLCs that is superficial and results-driven as opposed to process-driven can be a hindrance to PLCs (Zhang & Pang, 2016).

Success is hindered in some school settings when teachers are unable to address instructional concerns or are not allotted enough time to accomplish the tasks set forth in PLCs (Thessin, 2015). Equally, unfocused expectations for PLC outcomes and a lack of meaningful and purposeful communication by leadership personnel can be a downfall that inhibits PLC evolvement (Thessin, 2015). Instead of using PLCs as a forum where educators focus on data from the previous year's standardized tests and create more test-prep assessments, educators should focus on supporting students learning through interventions that are based on current measures in an effort to support standard mastery and avoid retaining students (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Whether PLCs are conducted virtually or face-to-face, to be effective they must be communities focused on best practices and not just social meetings for educators to vent about personal experiences (DuFour, 2014). Even so, educators must realize that school improvement

is not a fast fix but a process that must become a sustained measure within academic environments to bring about truly impactful change (Brendefur et al., 2014). Collaborative structures take time to grow and should become part of teaching practice to be well-developed over time as school leaders make them a focus of long-term planning (Hairon & Tan, 2017).

Schools must address "the socio-cultural processes required to move schools . . . out of school improvement" (Bennett et al., 2013, p. 407) instead of simply focusing on the structure of PLCs without having "democratic collaborative process and authentic community engagement" (Bennett et al., 2013). Huffman et al. (2016) also expressed the need for all stakeholders, including parents and community members, to have relationships that support sustainability of PLCs. When teachers perceive that the democratic process has not been employed within a school, some may not be as supportive of initiatives as they might have been if they could have voiced their opinions about the initiative from the start (Bergmark, Salopek, Kawai, & Lane-Myler, 2014). Also, in one ineffective PLC, participants felt that the PLCs stifled their teaching originality, and the common assessments used for data analysis did not effectively identify how to intervene so students could be successful on standardized assessments (Sims & Penny, 2014). While teachers may possess autonomy as educators, they "operate in a primarily examination-oriented education system, despite the call for a quality-oriented education in recent years" (Wang, 2016, p. 213). Efforts to improve teacher quality require school communities to be supportive, positive environments focused on collaboration among all involved parties (Baker-Doyle, 2015). Issues with communication and decision-making can impede PLC sustainability while capacity-building measures can increase the likelihood of enduring PLCs. Consequently, when deficits are addressed, these problems can become assets through the development and employment of various measures to correct the insufficiencies (Abrego & Pankake, 2011).

As collaborative teams interact with one another, the PLC structure can be further advanced. In addition, modification of educational techniques can be utilized to decrease teachers working in isolation and support teaching and learning goals that are a joint effort by PLC teams (Brendefur et al., 2014). Leaders and teachers have differing viewpoints on actions that impede PLCs. Leaders believe teachers given opportunities for professional development are passive, and teachers believe school leaders are ineffective since the leaders' plans are unclear. Thus, educators feel their efforts are fruitless and become unmotivated to participate in PLC activities (Zhang et al., 2017). It is essential for schools to understand that simply calling a meeting a PLC does nothing if working for the learning of all students through common formative assessment analysis and applicable intervention is not employed, thus the so-called PLCs becomes futile and will not result in positively impacting student achievement in the ways PLCs have potential to do (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Encouraging development of PLCs involves making principals and teachers aware of the benefits of collaborative learning. Schools should be heartened to advance an atmosphere of collaboration over one of competition (Zhang & Pang, 2016).

Summary

Teachers must instruct students rigorously and attain high achievement results despite insurmountable circumstances in attempt to satisfy accountability expectations (ESSA, 2015; DuFour et al., 2010; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010; NCLB, 2002). Thus, creating an environment supportive of this endeavor may increase teachers' success with diverse student populations (Chen & Mitchell, 2015; Jäppinen et al., 2016). Developing an environment conducive to exceptional performance requires that administrators create school cultures supportive of collaboration and focused on shared goals (Carpenter, 2015;

Garza et al., 2014; Gray et al., 2015; Zhang & Pang, 2016). Professional learning communities

have been successful in aiding in school cultures that support relationship building, shared

leadership, and empowered teachers (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Carpenter, 2015; Chen et

al., 2016). Many educators desire to aid students to become high, academic achievers; however,

teachers may lack the support necessary within the school setting to accomplish this monumental

task (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). When school organizations establish environments supportive

of collaboration and data analysis, positive impacts on student achievement and teacher

performance may occur (DuFour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2010; Farley-Ripple & Buttram,

2014).

Exploration of PLCs internationally has demonstrated characteristics of both successful

and struggling PLCs (Abrego & Pankake, 2011; Chen et al., 2016; Hairon & Tan, 2017;

Huffman et al., 2016; Jäppinen et al., 2016; Lee & Kim, 2016; Sims & Penny, 2014; Zhang et al.,

2017; Zhang & Pang, 2016). In order develop positive collaboration, administrators may benefit

from encouraging factors that contribute to successful PLCs that include shared leadership and a

focus on student learning instead of characteristics of ineffective PLCs, which may be overly

focused on the wrong data and do not support student needs or support learning for all (Chen et

al., 2016; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Jäppinen et al., 2016; Salleh, 2016; Wang, 2016). Therefore,

to continue PLC implementation, administrators leading schools with successful PLCs need to

share their stories to guide other administrators in the successful sustainability of PLCs (Garza et

al., 2014). Through effective leadership and supportive environments, administrators may be

able to create school climates structured to effectively sustain PLCs and thus impact teacher and

student performance (Gaikhorst et al., 2017; Garza et al., 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Klar &

Brewer, 2014).

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore administrators' perceptions of their role in sustaining PLCs in Louisiana schools. For this study, sustained PLCs were defined as professional learning communities that had been established using The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) and/or Best Practices Center (BPC) structures and continued for two or more years. The research design, setting, participants, and procedures are discussed in further detail in the chapter. The researchers' role, data collection, and analysis as well as trustworthiness and ethical considerations are also addressed before concluding this chapter in summary.

Design

This study utilized a transcendental phenomenology. Transcendental phenomenology was applicable to this study because the experiences of a group of individuals was sought to describe the phenomenon experienced by each participant and identify commonalities that exist among the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2017). Phenomenology was selected as the most appropriate and desired method for this study. Phenomenological studies can be either hermeneutical or transcendental in structure depending on the goal of the researcher (Creswell, 2017). In hermeneutical phenomenology, the researcher interprets the phenomenology being examined (Creswell, 2017). Understanding is developed through focused analysis on perspective and intention of the information being examined and understood, which is be neither true or false but simply an interpretation of the data (Patton, 2015). Conversely, transcendental phenomenology seeks to remove personal experience and present experiences of participants with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). A transcendental phenomenological approach allowed

for exploration of the personal perspectives of administrators. Description of the lived experiences of administrators' in sustaining PLCs isolated prejudice and provided a fresh perspective and candidness (Moustakas, 1994).

By selecting transcendental phenomenology, personal experiences were reserved so the true voices of the participants were presented (Moustakas, 1994). Studying numerous administrators provided a glimpse into the shared experience. Having experienced PLCs as a career, mentor, master, and curriculum support teacher provided an experience with PLCs that illuminated PLCs in these roles, yet, never having been an administrator, the experience is quite different. Being able to understand personal experience and perspective without letting those ideas impede the stories of the administrators' experiences is imperative to share the lived experiences of the participants. Data were carefully analyzed and recorded to only include themes that manifested within the various data collected. Bracketing allowed for discussion of personal experiences with PLCs and utilized segregation of those experiences to focus on participants' experiences (Creswell, 2017). Through interviews, administrators' experiences were demonstrated and descriptively expressed to provide the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2017).

Research Questions

The following research questions were utilized for this study:

RQ1: How do administrators perceive their role in sustaining PLCs in Louisiana schools?

RQ2: What structures do administrators perceive necessary to sustain PLCs?

RQ3: How do administrators support an environment conducive to sustaining PLCs?

RQ4: What challenges do administrators face in sustaining PLCs?

Setting

As an educator in Louisiana, I have an interested in developing a better understanding of how PLCs are utilized. Likewise, having been employed in a System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) school, experiencing the implementation of PLCs, and later being tasked with their facilitation, the collaborative structure proved personally beneficial. Additionally, as I was an educator in Title I schools throughout my career, I am drawn to better understand how to best meet the needs of students in low-socioeconomic populations. Louisiana serves a large population of students qualifying for services under Title I provisions (NCES, 2015). According to the NCES (2015) state profiles, Louisiana serves 703,390 students with 85.7% of schools identified as Title I schools. There are 11.7% of students with individualized education programs (IEP), 1.8% of students with identified limited-English proficiency, and 67.1% of students are eligible for free/reduced lunch. The racial/ethnic background of students within the state is as follows: White, 47.4%; Black, 45.0%; Hispanic, 4.0%; Asian, 1.4%; Pacific Islander, 0.0%; and American Indian/Alaskan Native, 0.7%. Louisiana has 70 school districts with 1486 schools and 99 charter schools. Because Title I provides financial resources to high-need populations and Louisiana has 85.7% of the schools identified as Title I schools, administrators' experiences in sustaining PLCs within identified school districts in Louisiana were sought.

After researching PLCs and effective leadership and school performance, the desire to better understand the principals' perceived roles in sustaining PLCs was honed. Because Louisiana has multiple districts that have participated in TAP, districts utilizing the TAP structure, which implements collaboration and best practices, were identified by referencing the Louisiana Department of Education site. The TAP structure has four major components, "multiple career paths, ongoing applied professional development, intentionally focused

accountability, and performance-based compensation" (Louisiana, 2017b, p. 3) to support teachers and students. The multiple career paths are career, mentor, and master teachers who serve varying roles in the school (Louisiana, 2017b). Consistent professional learning opportunities focused on student learning called cluster meetings are provided during school hours at individual school campuses, and additional support meetings on various topics are presented throughout the year at different sites to encourage support, collaboration, and best practice implementation (Louisiana, 2017b). Teachers are observed and evaluated for their teaching practices and receive feedback multiple times throughout the year using rubrics with specific criteria for teacher and student performance (Louisiana, 2017b). In TAP schools, teachers are also eligible for performance pay based on multiple criteria for performance (Louisiana, n.d.a). Funding for a single TAP school with around 25 teachers can cost over $150,000 per year; however, monies from existing funds or grant-based funding can be used to cover these costs (Louisiana, 2017b).

Best Practices Center (BPC) schools are grounded in the same principles as TAP schools; however, BPC may not implement all components of the TAP program (Louisiana, 2017b). Choosing not to implement all components of TAP in a BPC school may mean that these BPC schools lack master and/or mentor teachers, performance pay, or other structures specific to TAP schools. The BPC schools/districts can access an interactive website that provides information on a variety of topics including evaluation and professional development (Louisiana, 2017b). Thus, support systems are accessible to TAP and BPC to encourage implementation of best practices (Louisiana, 2017b). In addition to the support and training teachers receive, principals, as the instructional leaders of the school, can engage in professional learning as well to aid principals in honing their leadership skills and using TAP structures within their schools

(Louisiana, 2017a). Principals serve as the head of a leadership team that focuses on collaboration, common goals, and developing plans to reach established goals (Louisiana, n.d.a). This study was conducted with administrators of schools that had PLCs in place for at least two years.

For this study, schools were purposefully sampled from three parishes in the Southeastern region of Louisiana listed as having TAP or BPC schools (see Table 1). In the 2014-2015 TAP Schools in Louisiana report, Aptitude Parish had four schools that were identified as TAP schools but only one in the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 school years. Betterment Parish had three schools in 2014-2015 that were still listed as TAP schools in 2015-2016, but these schools were not listed for the 2016-2017 and 2017-2018 school years. Lastly, Competency Parish had five schools identified as TAP schools in the 2014-2015 school year, but none of the schools identified as TAP schools in the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 school years (Louisiana Department of Education, 2014). No schools currently identified as TAP schools in any of the noted school districts participated in the study; however, the TAP program served as the initial basis for participant sampling. Utilizing data obtained through the LDOE website listing TAP schools, school boards from the identified lists were selected to conduct research within specified districts (see Table 1).

Table 1

TAP/BPC School Districts for Study

School District	DPS	Letter Grade	Enrollment	SPED	Eco/Dis
Aptitude	83.4	C	19505	10%	80%
Betterment	95.9	B	3823	9%	69%
Competency	82.6	C	4858	8%	82%

Adapted from Louisiana, 1997-2017

The 2014-2015 TAP Schools in Louisiana report identified TAP schools in Louisiana and the years each of the schools have been a TAP school. The 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 TAP and TAP Best Practice (BPC) Schools reports listed schools that currently were TAP schools and identified BPC schools. Aptitude Parish had 33 schools identified as BPC schools in the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 reports, Betterment Parish had seven schools identified as BPC schools in the 2015-2016 report but none listed in the 2016-2017 report, and Competency Parish had nine schools identified as best practice schools in the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 reports. While Betterment Parish did not have any schools listed in the 2017-2018 reports, the schools previously listed were sought as potential sites because the PLCs structure may have been continued after ending the TAP and BPC connections. These schools have implemented the TAP model, which includes PLCs, for several years. Superintendents of each district were contacted to attain permission to contact the principals of the identified schools. Utilizing administrators who have been in schools with PLCs for at least two years allowed administrators to speak to their experiences in sustaining PLCs within these parishes. These three parishes and the schools therein served as the setting for this phenomenological study.

Participants

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants and locations to decisively develop an understanding of the problem of administrators' roles in sustaining PLCs (Creswell, 2017). Additionally, maximum variation, where identified criteria is employed to vary sites and participants to the greatest extent possible (Creswell, 2017), was utilized to ensure a well-rounded diversity of participants and sites by varying school grade levels and administrators' ethnicity and gender (see Table 2). By selecting 14 participants who experienced sustained

PLCs and varying the individuals and schools explored, a more comprehensive perspective of the roles these administrators play in sustaining PLCs unfolded. Participants included 10 females and four males and seven Caucasian and four African-American participants. The participants represented three high schools, four elementary schools, one middle school, and three elementary/middle school settings, and education levels included six participants with masters degrees, two participants with masters degrees plus 30 graduate hours, two participants with education specialists degrees, and one participant with a doctorate degree (see Table 2). Administrators from the prospective schools were selected based on sustained PLC criteria and preferably having had multiple years of experience within the specified school setting. Pseudonyms were assigned to all districts, schools, and participants, and demographic information for each is noted in narrative form and/or in a table.

Table 2

BPC School Participants in Three South Louisiana School Districts

School Site Name	Type of School
Bayou High	High
Cajun Elementary	Elementary/Middle
Dome Middle	Middle
Etouffee High	High
French Magnet	Elementary
Gumbo High	High
Heritage Elementary	Elementary
Iris Elementary	Elementary
Jazz Middle	Elementary/Middle
Krewe High	High
Lagniappe Elementary	Elementary
Mirliton Middle	Middle
Napoleon Elementary	Elementary
Okra Middle	Middle

Adapted from Louisiana, 1997-2017

Procedures

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought from Liberty University through

submission of the research proposal and all required documentation (see Appendix A). Once

IRB approval was granted, experts in the field were asked to analyze interview questions, and

necessary modifications were made. Permission was sought to use the Professional Learning

Communities Assessment-Revised (PLCA-R), a survey/questionnaire used to measure

perceptions of the school practices with PLCs (see Appendix B). After solicitation of expert

feedback, contact was made with identified school districts to seek permission to conduct

research with administrators within the identified districts (see Appendix C). Purposeful

sampling was employed with the goal of ensuring maximum variation of participants

experienced as administrators in schools with sustained PLCs. Once identified, participants were

provided with necessary details of the study to allow them to make informed decisions about

participation (see Appendices D, E, and F). Participants were asked to complete the PLCA-R to

assess their perceptions of PLCs within their schools, participate in semi-structured, open-ended,

face-to-face or virtual interviews. Interviews within reasonable driving distance of 45 minutes or

less were conducted face-to-face and interviews greater than 45 minutes in distance were

completed virtually. Participants also provided data related to PLCs within their school settings

(see Appendix G). This survey completed by participants was the first data collection measure to

assess administrators' experiences with PLCs in their school setting, and any questions related to

administrators were deemed a self-assessment. The PLCA-R was intended to provide an initial

source demonstrating the administrators' perceptions regarding PLCs within their school;

however, most administrators either did not complete the PLCA-R early enough prior to their

interview for me to analyze before the interview. Several principals did not complete the survey

until the interview, and thus the PLCA-R was completed during the interview.

Interviews were the next form of data collection employed in this study to provide

additional information related to administrators' experience, leadership, and PLC perceptions.

Participants were asked 10 questions related to career, leadership background, and PLC

perspectives. By interacting in interviews with the administrators, a clearer description of their

experiences was identified through exploration of their leadership roles and engagement in

PLCs. Audio-recorded interview transcriptions and documents were analyzed and coded for

themes. Transcription of the interviews was completed using Temi.com. All necessary

measures to ensure proper handling and confidentiality of information were maintained. Editing

of the transcriptions was completed while listening to the audio files to correct any

misrepresentations of content contained in the interviews. Researcher bias was reduced through

bracketing of personal opinions related to sustained PLCs and leadership.

Face-to-face interviews, anticipated to last approximately 45-60 minutes, were conducted

at the participants' school sites. Most interviews fell within the 45-60-minute allocated

timeframe; however, one interview lasted approximately three hours. Face-to-face interviews

were not scheduled for the participants in districts that were further than 45 minutes in driving

distance; thus, these participants were given the option of engaging in virtual interviews, which

were anticipated to last approximately 45-60 minutes using a program such as Skype or

FaceTime or by phone. All participants who were unable to participate in face-to-face

interviews opted to engage in phone interviews, and all were completed within the anticipated

45-60-minute period. All interviews were audio recorded using multiple devices to require less

notetaking and promote a more conversational atmosphere. Member checking was employed to

ascertain accuracy or identify areas needing clarification (Creswell, 2017). Once interviews

were transcribed, participants were contacted to inquire as to whether they wished to receive a

copy of the transcribed interview for their review and, if so, whether they wished it to be sent to

their school email address. Pseudonyms were used for all participants to maintain anonymity.

Once interviews were completed, school performance score documents obtained from the

LDOE were analyzed for school performance ratings from 2012 to present. Document analysis

to identify historical school performance and current PLC content was conducted as the third

measure of data collection. Analysis of the school performance data was a logical next step in

data collection after interviews because school performance score information highlights how the

schools rank in relation to state expectations. Additionally, available documents related to PLCs

within each school setting such as agendas, meeting records, and articles/documents/organizers used within the meetings were analyzed and coded for common themes. These documents attested to the structure and topics contain within PLCs at each school.

Data representing school performance were valuable to demonstrate the school climate related to academic performance. While these documents are not the only measure of success within schools, they provide a clearer picture of the school performance based on state guidelines. After interview completion, administrators were asked to participate in a virtual focus group interview to discuss their experiences with PLCs by addressing three to five questions posed to clarify or enhance themes identified in the interviews. Allowing administrators to participate in the online discussions allowed for interaction among the participants and, through this discussion, additional themes could be identified. Finally, participants completed mind maps of PLCs with images and/or text to explain their role in PLCs within their respective school settings (see Appendices H and I).

The organization of the sequence of data collection was structured so that each measure could serve as a building block for the next; however, as previously noted, the timing of receipt of some items from participants did not allow for sequential analysis, and thus some data was analyzed simultaneously. Structuring the data collection measures with surveys at the start intended to provide a basis of information on the administrators' experiences with PLCs through the means of descriptive data; however, analysis of the PLCR-A instrument after interviewing participants did provide a clearer picture of why principals expressed ideas contained within the interviews. While this is a qualitative study, the information drawn from questions asking administrators to rate their perceptions of each question on a sliding scale offered valuable perspectives on varying topics related to PLCs within their school settings. These categories of

descriptive data also allowed for analysis of components applicable to the experiences

(Moustakas, 1994). These answers were reviewed for commonality among participants, and the

data were analyzed in consideration of information and themes identified in the interviews.

Correspondingly, the interviews provided personal narratives that describe the participants'

experiences (Moustakas, 1994) to build upon the descriptive data obtained through the surveys.

Of the 14 interview participants, four administrators agreed to participate in an online

discussion focus group interview. This next form of data collection allowed for a less formal

atmosphere and provided interaction between participants where participants were asked three to

five questions related to themes to clarify and enhance the themes identified in the interviews.

Administrators participating in the focus group interview were also be asked to create mind maps

of their experiences with PLCs. Offering another means to share their experience that required

participants to think concisely, the mind maps allowed participants to think about their

experiences and provide an additional measure to analyze for commonalities among participants

to enhance major themes. mind maps were submitted to me digitally using email and stored as

password-protected documents. Using mind maps as a final means of data collection built upon

the conversations within the focus group interview and further developed understanding of the

participants' experiences.

The Researcher's Role

I have been an educator for 10 years serving in various capacities inside and outside of

the classroom. I began my career as a high school English teacher before the birth of my

children. I recall being very overwhelmed with this placement because it was nothing like my

student teaching experience. There was little collaboration in my school, and I felt isolated as

new teacher just experiencing my own classroom for the first time. After teaching for only a

year and a half, I took a few years to be home with my children. When I returned to the classroom, I was hired as a sixth grade English and reading teacher. This second school was slightly different than my first experience because there was some collaboration. I even remember meeting teachers in the summer before school started to plan for the upcoming year; however, there was no weekly collaboration to keep this momentum. During the following years, I taught varying subjects including English, reading, science, and social studies. Then I moved to a different school where I was trained as a Montessori educator, and I again taught English and reading.

My new school was a TAP school, and in my second year, I served as a mentor teacher who supported teachers in implementing best practices. As a TAP school, we had weekly collaboration meetings with strategies that focused on best practices for student learning. I enjoyed the interaction with fellow educators and the ability to plan for ways to best meet student needs. An opportunity arose for me to apply to be a TAP Master teacher; one of things TAP provides is multiple career paths. I served as a TAP Master teacher in my school until the school changed to a BPC school and my title was changed to curriculum support teacher. Being able to continue the collaboration and best practices implementation through facilitating PLCs has assisted me in helping teachers to meet the growing expectations and requirements in education today.

While I have participated in or facilitated PLCs under the leadership of a transformative principal for the past seven years, I have no relationship to any of the participants in this study. Two of the school districts I identified are an hour or more from my current school district, and I do not know any individuals at any of the identified schools. The third district is my current school district; however, I have no supervisory role or regular interaction with any of the

individuals that participated in this research study. After an exhaustive search of the literature demonstrated a need for additional exploration of administrator's roles in sustaining PLCs, I desired to explore administrators' perspective of their roles. With the retirement of my former principal and the anticipation working under a new principal, the administrators' role in sustaining PLCs, which I facilitate, was of utmost interest to me when I began this study. Likewise, I may desire to become an administrator in the future, and I would like to be able to implement and sustain PLCs in whatever school setting I lead. A transcendental, phenomenological study was beneficial because I desired to understand the experiences of administrators that make sustaining PLCs possible.

My experience with PLCs offers insight into how these collaboration meetings can assist teachers in meeting student needs and better perform to current expectations. Being familiar with school performance documents housed by the Louisiana Department of Education, current state academic standards, and teacher evaluation criteria encourages my support of PLCs to help teachers achieve their fullest potential in impacting student learning. I have benefited from these collaboration meetings, and I enjoyed hearing stories of administrators' experiences through the interview and focus group interview process as well as analyzing the surveys and mind maps for common themes. Residing in and working in a state that has undertaken the initiative of PLC implementation statewide makes understanding sustainability measures beneficial for current and future career aspirations.

Data Collection

Data for this transcendental phenomenological study of the experiences of school administrators sustaining PLCs was collected using surveys/questionnaires, interviews, document analysis, a focus group interview, and mind maps.

Surveys/Questionnaires

Permission was sought and obtained to use the Professional Learning Communities Assessment – Revised (PLCA-R) to establish descriptive statistics from each administrator regarding each school setting (see Appendix G, Olivier & Hipp, 2010). The PLCA-R "contains a number of statements about practices which occur in some schools" using a four-point scale indicating the degree to which participants agree or disagree with each statement (Oliver & Hipp, 2010, p. 1). Six dimensions are addressed by the assessment: (1) shared and supportive leadership, (2) shared values and vision, (3) collective learning and application, (4) shared personal practice, (5) supportive conditions-relationships, and (6) supportive conditions-structures (American). While this assessment has been utilized to assess teacher perceptions of PLC efficacy, the instrument was used to assess principals' perceptions; thus all questions referencing the principals' role was answered by the participating administrator as a self-assessment. The original PLCA was created to build upon Hord's (1996) School Professional Staff as Learning Community Questionnaire and address the "need for a new PLC assessment that reflects the reconceptualization of the dimensions and attributes of professional learning communities" (Olivier, Hipp, & Huffman, 2003, p. 69).

The PLCA-R is a revised version of the PLCA that was shown to be more effective in identifying characteristics that promote educator learning and demonstrating staff members' perceptions of PLC themes that have been deemed beneficial for PLC implementation and sustainability (Olivier & Hipp, 2010). The PLCA-R demonstrated internal consistency based on Cronbach alpha reliability and the assessment's use in multiple schools with various grade levels as well as multiple studies, attest to the instrument's validity (Olivier, 2009). This survey instrument provided a reliable means to collect descriptive data by providing an overview of

administrators' perceptions regarding PLCs within their respective schools, which provided the

basis on which to identify themes and to build upon other data collected through interviews,

document analysis, a focus group interview, and mind map analysis.

Interviews

Participants were interviewed using a semi-structured format to ask each participant the

same essential questions with necessary follow-up questions to extend interviewees responses

and delve deeper into the participants' personal experiences (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003).

Additionally, the semi-structured interview questions were open-ended to allow me to hear the

voices of the participants' authentic life experiences (Creswell, 2017). This semi-structured,

open-ended questioning format allowed enough structure for each interview to follow a similar

format but provide enough leeway to allow for the interviews to be conversational. Interviews in

phenomenological research use interaction and open-ended comments and questions to

understand the participants' experience being studied and provide a thorough account of that

experience free from the researcher's personal experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Standardized open-ended interview questions.

(1) Please describe your career(s) before becoming a school administrator.

(2) Please describe your educational background and any additional training you received

prior to or since becoming a school administrator.

(3) Please describe your experience with administrative leaders throughout your career.

(4) Please describe your leadership style. Has your leadership style changed over the course

of your placement as an administrator? If so, what caused you to modify your leadership

style? If not, are there any changes that you think you will need to make to your

leadership style in the foreseeable future?

(5) In what ways do you build relationships with and among staff members? What challenges do you face in building these relationships?

(6) Please describe your first encounter participating in or facilitating a PLC/cluster meeting.

(7) Were you at this school site when PLCs/cluster meetings were first implemented? If so, in what capacity did you serve at that time? If not, how did you feel about PLCs/cluster meetings when you arrived, and in what capacity did you serve at that time?

(8) What factors do you attribute to the sustainability of PLCs/cluster meetings within your school? How do you support and encourage the continuation of these factors?

(9) If you could create the perfect scenario for PLC/cluster meeting sustainability in your school, how would it appear and what would be necessary to bring that vision to fruition?

(10)   Is there anything else you'd like to share about PLCs/cluster meetings at your school?

The purpose of the questions related to prior employment and educational training was to obtain information on the types of career and educational experiences administrators have had that may affect their leadership styles. Literature has demonstrated the importance of leadership on teacher and student performance (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Thus, questions one and five accounted for leadership style to provide information regarding the administrators' leadership inventory. Questions one and two specifically spoke to career and educational training experiences that may have helped formulate the leadership of the administrator. Allowing the administrator to explain interactions with persons who lead them in question three demonstrated the administrators' perceptions on how these leaders, under whom the participants served, and how they impacted their leadership style. Teachers appreciate supportive and distributed leadership, and these leadership techniques can encourage collaborative relationships and positively impact student achievement (Carpenter, 2015; Garza et. al., 2014; Gray et al., 2015).

Questions four and five gave voice to the administrators' personal vision of their leadership and ways their leadership style builds relationships among faculty. The above-noted questions with prompting as necessary during the interview provided a clear picture of the administrators' background and current perceptions that support their leadership style and PLC sustainability within their respective organizations.

Questions six through nine focused on the administrators' experience with and perception of PLCs as well as what the administrators' ideal vision of a PLCs. Background information for the administrators' first experience with PLCs and whether the administrator was at their current school when PLCs were first implemented were addressed in questions six and seven. These questions allowed the administrator to express their initial perceptions of PLCs and background experience with PLCs in the current school setting. Benefits of PLCs include teachers sharing information with one another, focusing on students' needs, and teachers feeling valued for their endeavors (Lalor & Abawi, 2014). Questions eight and nine allowed administrators to highlight components they felt were beneficial to PLC sustainability and what their vision of a perfect environment for PLCs would contain. The purpose for questions six through nine was to provide a clear picture of administrators' perspectives of PLCs and what is required to sustain these PLCs within the school setting.

Document Analysis

Document analysis, "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents," (Bowen, 2009, p. 27) was used to examine school performance scores using electronic documents disseminated by the LDOE. School Performance Score (SPS) data was obtained from the LDOE and analyzed to document historical school performance. The 2015-2016 school report cards listed three years of school scores and letter grades as well as categories on how

minority students, students with disabilities, and economically-disadvantaged students performed in the school with the performance of the district and state listed for comparison (Louisiana, 1997-2016), and the 2016-2017 School Performance Score Summary provides the most recent school score and letter grade (Louisiana, 1999-2017). School report cards provide demographic data on the school makeup and identify the percentage of students within school who are on track or need additional support (Louisiana, 1997-2016). While the intent of this study was not to analyze student performance, knowledge of this information may be analyzed in relation to participants' perceptions in interviews, the focus group interview, and mind map representations. Additionally, document analysis was used to understand the goings-on in PLCs at each school through the exploration of agendas, meeting records, and articles/documents/organizers used within the meetings when provided by the participants. PLC agendas, meeting records, and articles/documents/organizers used within the meetings were analyzed and coded for themes. All identifying student data was redacted to protect confidentiality.

Questions guiding the document analysis.

(1) Historically, how has the school performed? Has performance been consistent, declining, or increasing through the years?

(2) What was the school performance rating prior to PLC implementation? What was the school rating after PLC implementation? What is the current school performance rating?

(3) What types of professional development are covered in PLCs? Who is leading PLCs? What type of data/student work analysis is being conducted in PLCs?

(4) How is the content of the PLC being applied consistent with the principals' notes?

Questions one and two focused on the data available for public review on the LDOE

website while questions three and four specifically addressed PLCs. The documents specific to PLCs by school varied; not all schools provided agendas, meeting records, and articles/ documents/organizers used within the meetings. Documents obtained from the LDOE website established historical data and placed that data in the context of information obtained from participants during interviews and the focus group interview (Bowen, 2009). Thus, the LDOE documents were noted by me in relation to the above questions; however, since they do not specifically speak to the nature of the administrators' experiences in the school setting with PLCs, they were coded in the manner the interviews and focus group interview transcriptions for themes. Any documents specific to the school administrators' experiences with PLCs and PLCs within the school setting received memos and coding related to themes that were identified in the interviews and the focus group interview. Since the documents were supplementary to the participants' first-hand accounts, I initially reviewed the documents and identified information relevant to my study then revisited the selections to categorize information (Bowen, 2009) identified from interviews and the focus group interview. Agendas, meeting records, and articles/documents/organizers used within the meetings provided insight into the structure of PLCs at the respective schools and helped outline the role administrators played with respect to the PLCs.

Focus Group Interview

Because participant interaction is supportive of sharing experiences within a group, a focus group interview was intended to support interactive communication among administrators experienced with sustaining PLCs/cluster meetings to garner insightful information on their prospective roles that were not easily acquired through other data collection measures (Morgan, 1997). The use of a single online focus group interview of four individuals was employed in this

study because the online forum was free, allowed participants flexibility in engagement at

convenient times and locations, and provided a longer wait time before responding if necessary

(Creswell, 2017). Slack.com was used to conduct a virtual focus group interview for the

administrators to build upon themes identified in the interviews and surveys.

Participants responded in an initial online forum to questions that built upon the themes

identified in the interviews to allow administrators to reflect on their experiences with sustaining

PLCs/cluster meetings. Additional questions were shared in an asynchronous format after

participants were provided the opportunity to participate in the real-time discussion. However,

participants chose not to interact with one another and only posted initial responses to the

questions presented even though interaction was encouraged and sought from the participants.

None of the participants attended the scheduled initial or follow-up synchronous meetings, so

participants were unable to interact in real-time. The timeframe between the initial discussion

and follow-up discussion where participants could log-in to comment on the forum was a two-

week period.

Following are the questions for the focus group interview and directions for answering

and responding within the discussion group:

Please answer the initial questions, then reflect on the answers of others in this group, and

post to the group discussion forum by commenting to and/or questioning other participants

regarding their responses to the questions originally posed.

(1) In the interviews, each of you discussed how previous leaders in your career shaped

your leadership style. If years from now your employees had to describe how your

leadership style impacted them, what types of characteristics would you hope they

would use to describe you regarding your leadership style and in what ways to you

think they would say your leadership style impacted them?
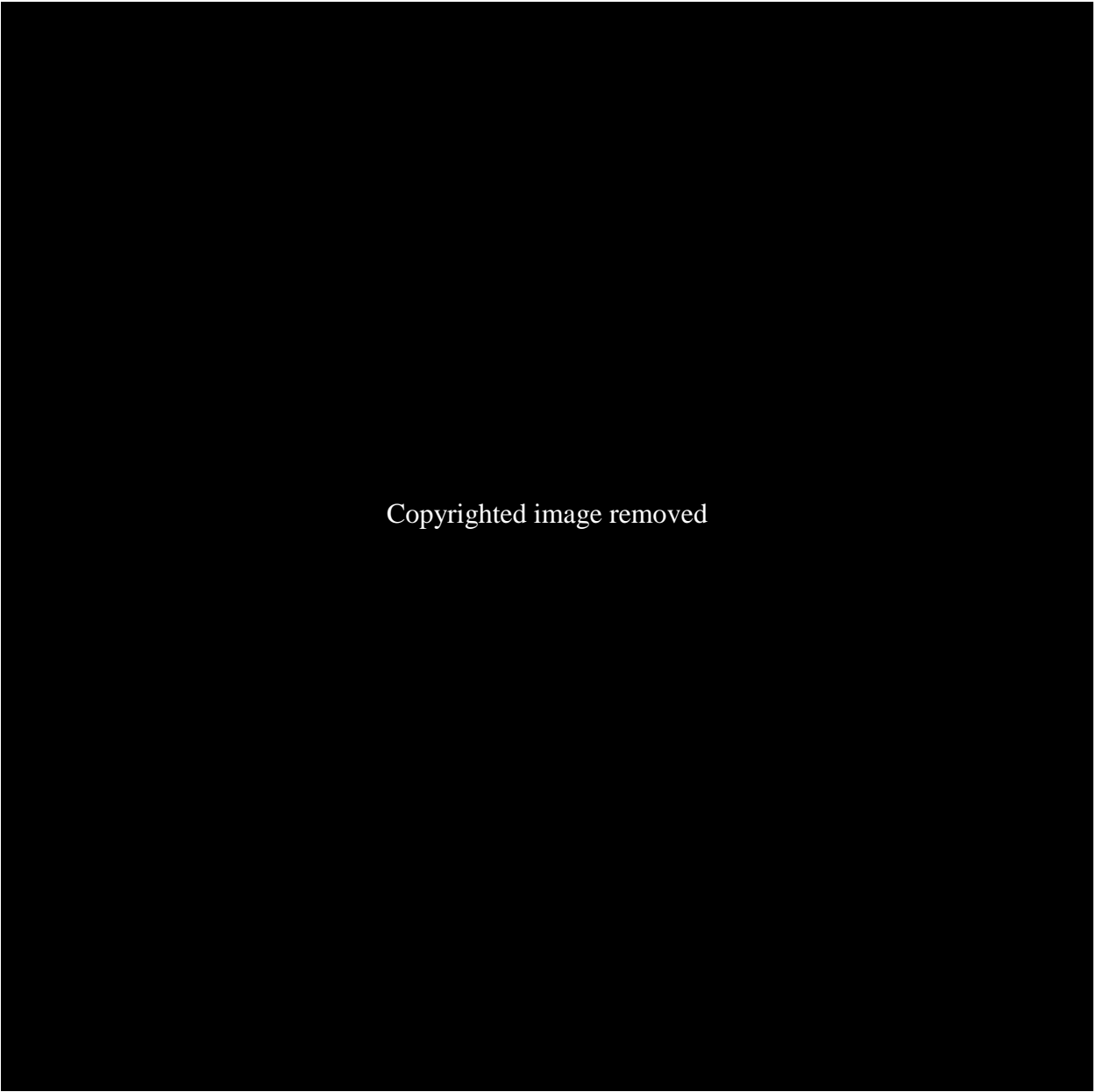
(2) Research has shown that PLCs can provide opportunities to empower teachers and that teacher leadership supports student and school performance. Capacity building was a theme identified in the interviews. In what specific ways do you work to build capacity in your schools and how do you think this capacity building impacts collaboration among your faculty?

(3) Vision and focus seem to be significant components of creating collaborative environments in your schools; however, for some, encouraging all teachers to maintain that focus seemed to be a challenge when teachers were on different levels and experiencing varying needs. Please elaborate on ways you work to create a focused culture and how you encourage teachers who may not be ready to enact the school vision.

(4) Using best practices and data-driven instruction were areas of commonality identified among participants. In what ways to do address using best practices and data-driven instruction with your faculty that differentiates expectations to meet teachers where they are in their teaching careers, and how do you support the efforts of all faculty in utilizing best practices and data-driven instruction.

These questions built upon themes that were identified in the interviews by clarifying the concepts that were presented in the initially-posed questions.

Mind Map

Buzan (1991) discovered mind maps when studying memory and the right and left hemispheres of the brain. Mind maps can allow people to create a graphic representation of a specific topic and connect information related to the topic (Buzan, 1991). Participants from the

focus group interview were asked to create a mind map of their perceptions of and experiences

with PLCs/cluster meetings demonstrating concepts related to their personal experiences. All

mind maps were digitally created and emailed to me by the participants. These mind maps were

analyzed for common themes and perspectives in relation to and compared with themes

identified from interviews and the focus group interview data collection. Interview participants

were asked to participate in the focus group interview and to complete the mind maps. Thus, a

link to a video model of what a mind map is, how to create a mind map, sample mind maps on a

different topic, and a script with the directions and expectations for creating thePLC/cluster

meeting mind maps were provided to the in-person interview participants in hard-copy and

emailed to all interview participants prior to the focus group interview (Appendix H & Appendix

I, see Figure 1).

Copyrighted image removed

Figure 1. An example of a mind map given to participants as a guide to create their own mind maps on PLCs. Adapted from "Tony Buzan: Inventor of Mind Mapping," (n.d.). (http://www.tonybuzan.com/gallery/mind-maps/).

Data Analysis

In this study, I employed Moustakas's (1994) seven steps for data analysis because the purpose was to explore the lived experiences of the participants. As data were analyzed using Moustakas's seven steps for data analysis, themes of the participants' experiences were identified and described in relation to one another. All relevant terms from surveys, interviews, documents, the focus group interview, and mind maps were listed in preliminary groups and assessed as to whether they were integral to the experience and to develop understanding of the experience, thus being subsequently labeled or eliminated (Moustakas, 1994). Once labeled, constituents were clustered into related themes (Moustakas, 1994). Next, representation of the constituents in the transcripts were analyzed to determine if they were clearly demonstrated, compatible, or relevant, and I provided examples of exactly what was transcribed from the interviews (Moustakas, 1994) and focus group interview to support the relevance of the information. Individualized descriptions of each participant's experience and "meanings and essences of the experience, incorporating the invariant constituents and themes" were shared (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Lastly an overall description of the entire participant groups' experience was provided (Moustakas, 1994).

Using bracketing, I separated my experiences to the greatest degree to present the perspectives of the participants with a clear focus on the phenomenon being explored (Moustakas, 1994). I outlined any bias by clearly and thoroughly explaining any perceptions regarding PLCs that may conflict with participants' experiences in an effort to negate prejudice regarding sustained PLCs and share the participants' experiences with a fresh perspective (Moustakas, 1994). Allowing the experiences of the participants to unravel through detailed description, I removed personal bias to the utmost extent possible through memoing after

interviews and during data analysis to articulate administrators' experiences and communicate the emergence of identified themes (Creswell, 2017). Initial groupings of ideas were analyzed, and irrelevant ideas were removed by evaluating the necessity of the information before assembling common themes into individualized descriptions (Moustakas, 1994).

Analysis of the survey instrument provided descriptive statistics to support administrators' perceptions regarding PLCs within their school. The PLCA-R also has a comment section which allowed for analysis of common themes within the comments provided by administrators; however, most participants did not provide written comments on the survey/questionnaire. Documents were annotated and open-coded for themes related to how administrators sustain PLCs. Likewise, interviews were open-coded to identify clusters of meaning that were used to document the administrators' experiences (Creswell, 2017). Open coding requires cataloging data obtained from transcribed interviews into categories and then narrowing the categories to the study's major themes (Creswell, 2017). Once initial coding was completed, I used focused coding to condense the data through compilation of preliminary coding into larger classifications that incorporated numerous codes (Bailey, 2007). Significant statements were noted and analyzed to categorize common themes from survey comments, interviews, and documents. Overall, data collection was used to provide "a composite description of the essence of the experience for all of the individuals" (Creswell, 2017, p. 75).

Trustworthiness

To ensure the validity of a study, it is necessary to accurately and fairly represent the data gathered throughout the study (Creswell, 2017). As a means of establishing trustworthiness, measures to ensure credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were employed.

By employing a variety of data collection and analysis measures, validation of this study should be increased.

Credibility

Triangulation of data can be achieved through use of numerous, varied sources and data collection measures that substantiate validity of the study (Creswell, 2017). Triangulation of data through analysis of a survey instrument, interviews, and documents was used to increase the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2017). Triangulation of data was achieved by using multiple and varied data sources and collection measures to provide a complex picture of the experience being studied (Creswell, 2017). The survey instrument, interviews, documents, focus group interview responses, and mind maps were viewed in relation to reviewed literature. These multiple resources provided "corroborating evidence" to provide insight on identified themes and participant perspectives (Creswell, 2017, p. 260).

Dependability and Confirmability

Peer debriefing "is a process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytic session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308). Colleagues were sought for peer debriefing to be reviewers who assessed the interview questions prior to interviews being conducted to assist me in posing questions that progressed the study and again once data analysis was conducted and documented to aid in the evaluation of the accuracy of data analyses. Peef debriefing was also used to determine if my descriptions of the interviews honestly represented the administrators' experiences.

Next, clarification of researcher bias regarding sustained PLCs was utilized in this study to increase validation through an explanation of my experience with PLCs. Employment as a

current curriculum support teacher who facilitates PLCs and past career experiences participating

in PLCs needed to be addressed to mitigate possible bias and allow the reader to comprehend my

outlook in relation to PLCs and any components that may affect the examination of the

phenomenon (Creswell, 2017). Additionally, memoing was utilized to document ideas during

analyses of data and chronicle discernments as they developed (Creswell, 2017).

Member checking to ascertain the accuracy of interview transcripts and to provide an

opportunity for clarification if necessary increased study validation. After transcription and

preliminary analyses, participants were provided an opportunity to reflect on the accuracy of the

accounts. Participants' critique of the transcripts and provision of their perspective on the

transcribed accounts and what may be lacking can support the accuracy of the study (Creswell,

2017). Allowing participants to review information provides an extra measure to ensure the

individuals' views are presented free from bias. After transcription was completed, participants

were contacted to see if they wished to receive a copy of the transcript emailed to them so they

could review the document for accuracy and clarify any content they deemed needing additional

information.

Transferability

Participants were selected from three South Louisiana school districts based on specific

criteria presented in the participants section. I determined if they met that criteria based on

information obtained from the LDOE website. Transferability to similar demographic

populations may be favorable. Information was presented with rich, thick description to

encourage readers to apply information to other settings and evaluate whether transference is

applicable (Creswell, 2017). Through detailed description the readers may develop a greater

understanding of how the research might be applicable to another setting (Creswell, 2017).

Ethical Considerations

My bias was addressed through bracketing, so participants' experiences can be presented free from personal perspectives (Creswell, 2017). Bracketing myself out by allowing the experiences of the participants to be at the forefront of information "allow[ed] whatever is before us in consciousness to disclose itself so that we may see with new eyes in a naive and completely open manner" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 86). I engaged in memoing throughout the research process to allow the administrators' experiences to be presented through rich description. Information was presented in a manner that utilizes "elimination of suppositions and the raising of knowledge above every possible doubt" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). Focus was on the experiences of the participants so that "the everyday understandings, judgments, and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited, freshly, naively, in a wide open sense, from the vantage point of a pure or transcendental ego" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33).

IRB approval was sought to assess potential harmful implications for participants (Creswell, 2017). All participants were treated respectfully and provided informed consent that participation in the study was voluntary, and they could choose to be removed from the study at any time. Likewise, care was taken to respect the culture, religion, gender, and other necessary characteristics of all participants (Creswell, 2017). Pseudonyms were utilized for administrators, schools, and parishes participating in the study and demographic information was presented in a non-identifiable manner to protect the anonymity of the participants. Security of information was maintained through a password-locked computer, password-protected email accounts for documents sent digitally, and locked file cabinets for all data collected. Only persons directly engaged with study had access to the information collected. Memoing to record ideas

throughout data collection and analysis was used in document the process as it unfolded (Creswell, 2017).

Summary

Grounding this study in Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory provided a lens of shared leadership and collaboration that these theories support. By exploring administrators' experiences with leadership and PLCs through surveys, interviews, and document analysis, I hoped to describe ways participants sustain PLCs within their school settings. Analyzing data to develop a thorough understanding of the experiences of administrators in sustaining PLCs provided quintessential insight into the phenomenon. The multiple data collection measures resulted in triangulation and provided a thorough perspective of the administrators' experiences in sustaining PLCs within their schools. Peer debriefing, clarification of researcher bias, memoing, and member checking enhanced the dependability and credibility of this study.

It is hoped that the knowledge gained from administrators' perceived roles in sustaining PLCs is transferable for other settings by studying multiple school districts, sites, and utilizing maximum variation of participants. It is important to be ethical when conducting research and IRB approval provided an oversight to ensure all necessary measures to protect participants was employed. Respectful treatment of the participants encouraged participation in the study, yet administrators' participation was voluntary and could have thus been terminated at any time. It is hoped that through careful data analysis, themes related to administrators' roles in PLC sustainability were identified.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore

administrators' perceptions of their role in sustaining PLCs in Louisiana schools.

Transcendental phenomenology was employed to focus on participant experiences with

sustaining PLCs. Fourteen public school administrators' experiences with sustaining PLCs were

explored in three Southeast Louisiana school districts, which included four high schools, four

middle schools, four elementary schools, and two elementary/middle schools. Contained in this

chapter are participant descriptions, participant and school demographics, research findings, and

a summary. Results are presented in relation to identified themes based on research questions

guiding this study. Participant experiences regarding the themes leadership responsibilities, best

practices, and building capacity are presented. Research questions are answered following the

discussion of the identified themes.

Participants

The participants in this study were principals at 14 public schools in three Southeast

Louisiana school districts (see Table 3). Purposeful sampling was used to include administrators

of schools that were identified as The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP)

and/or Best Practices Center (BPC) schools in Louisiana because the structure of these programs

includes collaboration meetings as a key component of their purpose. School districts were

systematically selected to include districts that utilized TAP and BPC programs since these

programs support collaboration among faculty and focus on student achievement. Participants

included 10 females and four males and nine Caucasian and five African-American participants

from four high schools, four middle schools, four elementary schools, and two

elementary/middle schools (see Table 4). Recruitment of participants at potential school sites

was not isolated to only schools that would provide maximum variation in the categories

mentioned. It was hoped that through contact with various individuals willing to participate, that

a well-rounded representation of educators would develop. Participant demographics were

unknown prior to contacting the administrators; however, as participants agreed to be included in

the study, variation in gender, ethnicity, and education level occurred naturally. This variation

diversified participants by varying school grade level types and administrators' ethnicity, gender,

and education level. Through maximum variation of participants, varied viewpoints were

explored in relation to the phenomenon (Creswell, 2017).

Table 3

Participant School Sites in Three South Louisiana School Districts

School District	DPS	Letter Grade	Enrollment	SPED	Eco/Dis
Bayou High	103.4	A	594	5%	48%
Cajun Elementary	90.6	B	532	10%	78%
Dome Middle	68.8	C	197	11%	93%
Etouffee High	90.2	B	1379	6%	77%
French Magnet	108.4	A	*	*	~35%
Gumbo High	69.8	D	404	13%	92%
Heritage Elementary	75.8	C	617	14%	77%
Iris Elementary	88.2	B	397	14%	83%
Jazz Middle	64.5	C	445	13%	90%
Krewe High	83.6	C	694	8%	64%
Lagniappe Elementary	81.7	B	682	12%	75%
Mirliton Middle	63.4	C	551	10%	93%
Napoleon Elementary	67.4	C	530	9%	98%
Okra Middle	47.6	D	394	17%	97%

Adapted from *principal report; Louisiana, 2014; Louisiana, 1997-2017; Louisiana, 1999-2017.

Table 4

School Administrator Overview

Administrator	School Setting	Ethnicity	Gender	Highest Degree
Austin	High	Caucasian	Male	Masters
Barbara	Elementary/Middle	Caucasian	Female	Education Specialist
Caroline	Middle	Caucasian	Female	Masters
Donna	High	Caucasian	Female	Masters
Evelyn	Elementary	Caucasian	Female	Masters
Francis	High	Caucasian	Female	Masters +30
Gerald	Elementary	African-American	Male	Masters +30
Hannah	Elementary	Caucasian	Female	Doctorate
Iris	Elementary/Middle	African-American	Female	Education Specialist
Jesse	High	African-American	Male	Masters
Kathy	Middle	Caucasian	Female	Masters
Lori	Middle	African-American	Female	Masters
Marion	Elementary	African-American	Male	Masters
Nancy	Middle	Caucasian	Female	Masters +30

Adapted from teachlouisiana.net

Presented below in greater detail are descriptions of each participant regarding their personal experiences with the phenomenon studied including information on their education and background as educators. All participants were assigned a pseudonym that is utilized in the descriptions and throughout the findings to protect their anonymity.

Austin

Austin served as a high school social studies teacher and coach for 18 years prior to becoming a school administrator. He majored in P.E. and minored in social studies then earned his master's degree in supervision and administration. Austin did not serve as an assistant principal or any other supervisory role before becoming a principal. According to Austin, he had

a good role model of an administrator in one of his family members during his education career, yet when he received his master's degree in supervision and administration, he was unsure if that would be the route he would take. Nonetheless, earning that master's degree did prove beneficial when Austin decided to enter administration. His leadership style is one that allows persons he leads to demonstrate their strengths in whatever areas they feel most successful. Austin has a strong administrative staff who supports and helps enact the school vision, and he willing shares leadership with his assistant principal who Austin describes as "great with instruction, and . . . married to this school, . . . so I give her a lot of authority when it comes to, like all our professional development, she is in charge of that." Austin and his staff have created a structure in his school so PLCs can be conducted "once a month" where teachers "don't lose any instruction time."

Barbara

Barbara was a high school teacher for 12 years before becoming a high school assistant principal. She served as a Master Teacher when the district became a TAP district after receiving a grant. After being the Master Teacher, Barbara desired to serve in a different, more hands-on role. Curriculum and instruction were the focus of her masters and education specialist degrees, and she desired to have a greater role in that regard in the school setting. Barbara had observed administrators whom she worked under during her teaching career and decided she would be well-suited for an administrative position. She took the required coursework to add the administration certification to her teaching credentials and became an administrator of an elementary school. She describes herself as having a shared and servant leadership style, and Barbara desires input from all her faculty to bring the school vision to realization. Barbara explained that PLCs are a part of the district focus saying, "from the top down is just that's what

we're doing, and we have to do it. It's really not a choice option." To effectively integrate PLCs into her school day, Barbara said, "We have a separate schedule on cluster day" where ancillary personnel are in charge of students so "teachers can go to cluster."

Caroline

Caroline was a classroom teacher for four years and technology facilitator for a year before becoming a TAP Master Teacher. She then became an assistant principal before moving into the principalship where she currently serves. Caroline earned her master's degree in educational technology and took the licensing test for administration. She believes strongly in the best practices presented in the TAP program, and she said TAP "totally changed my life. I didn't have an idea of what good teaching looked like specifically until we used the NIET rubric." Caroline believes in approaching decisions collaboratively as much as possible, and she delegates tasks to individuals who can successfully enact them. She also builds relationships by providing regular incentives to motivate and build her staff members' morale.

Donna

Donna taught high school English and coached for nine years before applying to become a TAP master teacher. After serving as a TAP, she became an assistant principal before becoming a principal. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in English and originally planned to attend law school but felt a calling towards education and decided to pursue a career in the field of education. Donna earned her certification to teach and a master's degree in educational leadership. In describing herself, she identified as a leader who supports the strengths of her faculty and trusts them to carry out their respective jobs. Donna expressed how both positive and negative experiences with past administrators developed her leadership style and encouraged the relationships she builds with her faculty and students. She expressed importance of building

relationships with students saying, "You know, if you don't have a relationship with the kids, then you really can't grow a school." Additionally, Donna believes sustainability of PLCs is directly related to the school administrator demonstrating

> fidelity to the system when they're scheduling, when they're planning for the leadership meetings, actually set up the planning for the clusters, the data being tracked and monitored. All those things have to be happening from the administrative level if you expect teachers to truly buy in and become part of the process.

Evelyn

Evelyn served as a first-grade, public school teacher for 13 years after two years teaching private school before serving in an intervention role for kindergarten and first grade. She then served as a reading coach and TAP master teacher before becoming the director of a magnet school. Evelyn's leadership style is a combination of shared and student-oriented, but also, she alluded to servant leadership noting, "I am server just as much as I am a leader." Evelyn was at her current school during the inception of PLCs and valued the role the master teacher plays in the facilitation of these collaboration meetings. Her focus on the importance of the master teacher is so great that Evelyn willingly reduced her personnel in one grade level to be able to hire a master teacher because she said regarding master teachers, "I know how important it is and what type of role that they play." Evelyn had the training offered by the district when the TAP program was implemented, but she desired to better understand the collaborative process and its impact on student achievement, so she researched PLCs and collaboration to more effectively implement these techniques in her school. Evelyn uses her leadership team structure to build capacity in her grade level leaders with the process they follow of sharing in leadership team and

having those idea presented to grade levels. She noted, "[Grade level chairs] in turn take it back to their grade level whatever was discussed in leadership."

Francis

Francis is a high school principal who taught high school before serving in various roles outside of the classroom. She has a master's degree in educational leadership plus 30 additional graduate hours in a variety of areas such as foreign language, curriculum, and psychology. Francis has been in public education for over 20 years and is driven to support teachers in enacting new standards and supporting student success. During her career as an educator, Francis has had the opportunity to serve by mentoring new teachers, being a TAP Master Teacher, and serving as an assistant principal. In addition to her academic career, Francis has a military background, which has also shaped her leadership style. She believes in implementing best practices and maintaining a focus on a clear school vision in an effort to best impact student learning. Francis also believes the concepts she learned through the TAP process have shaped and guided the way she supports teachers and her expectations for student instruction. She and her administrative staff balance each other so that their assets may be best utilized.

Gerald

Gerald was a classroom teacher for five years in various disciplines because he was always willing to volunteer when the principal needed someone for a new assignment. This change in content each year did not allow Gerald to master any one grade level or subject matter but gave him a well-rounded perspective on which to base his future administrative duties. Gerald became an administrator and served as an assistant principal at a few schools before working at the district office for a few years. He then became the principal at his current school and has served there for almost five years. Gerald credits his leadership style to his education

career experiences and his military background. He expressed, "I'll never forget my wing commander . . . talked about being a servant leader, and when he talked about that, that really hit me, and I said that's me." This calling to servant leadership means Gerald active participant in collaboration meetings. He works side-by-side with his educators to enact the school vision and impact student achievement. Gerald believes in being visible on his campus, developing relationships, and building capacity in his faculty. Regarding his role in collaboration meetings when teachers are creating plans and assessments, Gerald says, "I'm in there with them helping them develop it, giving my input, and learning from them because they've gotten pretty good at doing those things."

Hannah

Hannah's parents were both educators, and she decided to attend college as an English education major. She is a nationally board certified teacher who taught English for six years at the middle school and high school levels. She earned her master's degree plus 30 graduate hours in administration and supervision and her doctorate in educational technology. Hannah served as a high school assistant principal for six years before deciding to apply for a curriculum position at an elementary school because she stated, "I decided it would be a good career move. It took me out of administration, but it allowed me to get more curriculum, also to get elementary experience." As a curriculum coach, her focus shifted from discipline to data; thus her love of data was honed. Hannah encourages communication from her faculty and is open to hearing ideas from brand new to veteran teachers to better serve them. She elicits feedback and uses the information to modify her leadership style to meet the needs of the faculty. Hannah also believes in rewarding teachers' effort and motivating a positive atmosphere on her school campus through reward-based acknowledgements that support teachers. She uses PLCs to provide training and

assistance to assist teachers in implementing and analyzing teaching and learning through use of best practices. In relation to the focus and structure in PLCs, Hannah noted, "We all bring in our tests for the week so that we can analyze them . . . We look at what they're doing through interventions, and we look at test data."

Iris

Iris is an administrator who comes from a family of educators, but her first career was in patient education not the K-12 education setting. Early in that career, she was attending graduate school with the focus of health education and realized the similarities to the traditional academic education structure. Iris decided to try her hand at substitute teaching and was quickly offered a full-time teaching position in a private school before transferring to the public education setting. She went back to school to earn her teaching certification and master's degree in education administration and an education specialist degree in curriculum and instruction. Iris began as a less collaborative leaders because she "felt like there was a whole lot was at stake, and [she] felt like the responsibility . . . on [her] shoulders." However, over the course of her placement as an administrator, Iris has

> Found the groove in terms of how to sustain a school . . . making sure that there's stability and capacity building and that everyone feels a part of the vision and that we're all looking at what's best for kids.

Sustainability of PLCs, according to Iris, means using the structures that are in place in her school because she said, "We just need to work the plan. Figure out what it is that you need. Look at your data. Know who your kids are."

Jesse

Even though Jesse comes from a family of educators, his first career was an environmental scientist. He majored in environmental science and after graduation worked for an environmental agency dealing with hazardous waste. He then got married and moved further from his employment, so Jesse decided to begin teaching. Jesse taught middle school science before returning to school to earn his master's in educational leadership. He served as an assistant principal for a few years before being deployed to Iraq. After deployment, Jesse was assigned as assistant principal, and then he became principal of that same school where he currently works. Jesse noted that his leadership style as being a servant leader and said, "I don't feel that the success of the school solely belongs to me." Jesse credits his military training with honing his regard for communication with students and staff, which supports and environment of understanding and ownership of all stakeholders in the school. Jesse feels that creating a culture focused on a common vision requires buy in from all stakeholders, noting, "When your teachers buy into it, and your kids buy into it, your school culture becomes really, really positive." Additionally, Jesse noted to encourage teachers to understand why something is a focus, "sometimes you just need to use data to back it up. It can be emotional. It can't be your feelings. You can't say, 'I think.' or 'I feel.' They don't want to hear that."

Kathy

Kathy taught fourth and fifth grade for 10 years before becoming a technology facilitator for three years. Kathy earned an elementary education degree and her master's in educational leadership. Her administrative career started with a yearlong internship as a principal where she spent a few weeks at a time in different assignments, including a private school and the district office, and then she became a principal. This internship gave her a unique experience with a

variety of leadership settings. Kathy describes herself as being "very student oriented" now, but in the beginning of her administrative career, she was just in survival mode. She believes she and her faculty have a better grasp of data-driven instruction, but still feels they have work to do in data analysis. Capacity building and moving in the right direction are also important aspects of Kathy's leadership. The collaboration in PLCs allows faculty to meet and work towards goals to impact student learning based on identified needs. However, Kathy sees the importance of slowing down and making informed decisions before acting so everyone can have a voice in working through what is necessary. Kathy believes the structures they have in place with her leadership team are supportive of sustaining PLCs, but she noted that it is not as collaborative as she would like it to be in getting input from the teachers because she said, "We kind of just say, 'this is what we need to get done' . . . but I feel like we're more about what the leadership team wants to do . . . They're just kind of doing what we ask them to do."

Lori

Lori is an elementary education teacher who taught fifth and sixth grade for 15 years before becoming an administrator. She served as an assistant principal for two years and has now been a principal for four years. Lori earned her master's degree in educational leadership and has completed various trainings within her district but not necessarily leadership training, aside from her master's degree. She served under administrators who impacted her leadership style and focus on data-driven instruction. Lori values implementing and utilizing best practices and having transparent leadership so all stakeholders are aware of the school's vision. She feels that it has taken a few years, but that the school finally has the transparency she desires to provide under her leadership. With this openness, Lori maintains an open-door policy where she is approachable to teachers, and they feel free to discussion any concerning situations with her so

they may work through them. Lori understands the importance of using data and best practices in her school setting and noted, "if you do not have data to support it, it doesn't make sense, or it is not a part of the best practice, so . . . what true best practices are and how the data reflects what you are doing" are essential to the collaboration process. She also noted the importance of having "all the components of an effective meeting . . . and the teachers bringing all the materials that they need, and teachers being fully prepared."

Marion

Marion originally planned to major in business but was not thrilled with the amount of math coursework required, and he decided to pursue education at the suggestion of a friend. He taught English III and English IV for eight years before becoming an assistant principal. Marion pursued his master's in hopes of serving as an administrator, and he became an assistant principal the fall after he graduated with his master's degree. After earning an English degree, Marion earned a master's degree in educational leadership and is currently pursuing his doctorate in leadership as well. In addition to this coursework, he completed the state department program as a turnaround specialist that included leadership coursework on how to turnaround failing schools in his previous district. Teachers are well supported in Marion's school and collaboration is a clear focus with three days of collaboration by grade level each week so that no one is isolated in his or her teaching methods. PLCs assist teachers in better accomplishing the requirements placed upon them in the current field of education according to Marion because he noted, "Nobody is on the island. You have strong people on that team . . . we're sharing best practices . . . and it has just made a big difference, and it's built that collaboration. It's built collegiality."

Nancy

Nancy is an elementary teacher who taught sixth grade for most of her classroom years. Some of her additional experience was in self-contained regular education classrooms, but she had a focus on science and math in the semi-departmentalized sixth grade classroom. Nancy served as an instructional facilitator before becoming an assistant principal and then becoming a principal. Her undergraduate degree is in English literature with a minor in business, and she did not aspire to be a teacher, but she was asked to take a teaching position just a two before the school year began; thus Nancy's teaching career started. Nancy went back to school to earn her certificate to teach and continued with her master's in curriculum and instruction and her plus 30 in administration and supervision. She values her curriculum coaches and noted, "I rely 100 percent on my curriculum coaches," and defers to them to facilitate PLCs most often, but with such a strong focus on collaboration, anyone may be called upon to present necessary information he or she has received that needs to be disseminated to the faculty. Nancy explained the process of how what is covered in PLCs is begun in leadership team, which contains a representative group of personnel form the school, saying, "we meet and go over things that need to be done and things that need to be shared in in collaboration meetings."

<div align="center">

Results

</div>

This study was guided by four research questions addressing K-12 administrators' roles in sustaining professional learning communities (PLCs), the structures they deem necessary to sustain PLCs, how administrators support environments conducive to sustaining PLCs, and what challenges administrators face in sustaining PLCs. Emergent themes and sub-themes are described below.

Surveys/questionnaires and interviews received/completed at the time of, or shortly prior to, the interviews provided an overview of how each principal assessed their school in relation to corresponding categories. Ratings for each category regarding PLCs in their schools aligned with the experiences administrators provided in the interviews. While the instrument was designed to allow for written comments for each section, only one participant provided detailed comments on the survey/questionnaire and two others provided short comments for some categories. Having the detailed comments from the one administrator added to her story because she was able to explain her thoughts about each category and how those statements reflected the PLC environment in her school. During analysis of surveys/questionnaires and interview transcription and analysis, participants' experiences became vivid and interconnected as the themes began to emerge. Transcribing, reviewing, and categorizing the data allowed me to relive the interviews of each participant, garner more insight into their stories, and make connections to experiences of other participants, which provided me a broader picture of the administrators' encounters with the phenomenon being studied.

Four people participated in the virtual focus group interview on Slack.com, and three people returned completed mind maps by email submission. Focus group interview data built upon the ideas those participants shared in the individual interviews and allowed deeper understanding of their lived experiences sustaining PLCs. Of the three participants who created mind maps to represent their perceptions of PLCs, one participant used only pictures, another only words, and the third both words and images to describe PLCs. The mind maps, in their varying forms, captured the concepts of collaboration, unified vision, and specific goals thus supporting the overall components noted as essential to sustaining PLCs. Documents from the Louisiana Department of Education demonstrated how schools have performed in recent years

according to state performance guidelines, and documents related to PLCs within each school setting showed how those schools are applying the concepts and structures administrators shared in their interviews.   The emergent themes were interconnected, and thus data were analyzed further to determine which ideas most clearly supported each emergent theme. Themes and sub-themes along with codes are listed in Table 5.

Table 5

Themes and Codes

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes
Leadership Responsibilities	Servant Leadership	Student needs
		Teacher needs
		School needs
		Learn from everyone
		Lead to better serve
		Connections
		Christian perspective
		Positive
		Supporter
		Listener
		Teamwork
		Not a one man show
		Success belongs to us
		Share
		Empower
		Build capacity
		Input
		Not the only decision maker
		Trust
		Shared knowledge
		Work for my staff
		Provide resources
		Challenge staff
		High expectations
	Shared Leadership	Doing what they need
		Transparent
		Shared leadership
		Prepare for loss of personnel
		Support people's strengths
	Student-Oriented	Student needs
		About students
		Best for kids
		Put the kids first
		Get in the trenches
		In it together
		Structures
		Fairness for all
		Accountability

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes
	Administrator Visibility	Meet regularly
		Speak in halls
		What do you need from me?
		Open-door policy
		Positive
		Set the tone
		Visible
		Approachable
		Feedback
	Dedicated Focus	Commitment
		Dedicated
		Data-Driven
		Contributing
		Being Present
	Communication	Communication
		Transparent
		Get input
		Open
		Listening to Feedback
		Giving Feedback
		Relationships
		Strategies
		What can we do better?
		Two-way Communication
		Open-door policy
	Involvement	Open communication
		Desire to fix problems
		Wanting to do better
		Being involved
		Planning
		Goals
		Vision
		Leadership team
		Working what's working
		Provide resources
		Listening/Feedback
		Help them out
		Structure
		Support
		Relationships
		Staff growth
		Appreciative of staff
		Positive environment

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
Best Practices	Purposeful Planning	Scheduled
		Varied PLC member groups
		Intention
		Purposeful
		Student achievement
		Connections
		Communication
		Collaboration
		Persevere
		Adjust
		Vision
		Focused culture
		Differentiating
		Support
		Backwards design
		Data
		Common planning
		Job-embedded
	Data-Driven Focus	Scores
		Focused
		Dig deep
		Guide
		Vision/mission
		Student work
		Chart
		Analyze
		Discuss
		Strategy
		Data room
		Refinement
		Reinforcement
		Data
		Intervention
		Best practices
		Data supported decisions
		Vertical alignment
		School performance
		Growth
	Common Vision	Principal presence
		Valued
		Common good
		Solutions
		Collaboration
		Success
		Buy-in

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
		Responsibility
		Believe
		Vision
		Actionable
		Expectations
		Data
		Focused
		Happy teachers
		Support
		Monitoring
		Ownership
		Pride
		Shared workload
Building Capacity	Encouraging Strengths	Shared
		Capitalize on strengths
		Differentiate
		Contribute
		Empowered
		Trust
		Delegate
		Responsibility
		Bonded
		Accountability
		Willing to try
		Longevity
		Stability
		Capacity
		Vision
		Support
		Opportunity
	Understanding Limitations	Shared leadership
		Capability
		Scaffolded
		Competency
		Empowered
		Buy-in
		Collaboration
		Communicate
		Data
		Next steps
		Trust
		Relationships
		Strengths/weaknesses

Theme	Sub-theme	Codes
		Encourage
		Asking/offer teachers opportunity
	Developing Trust	Identifying leaders
		Creating a team
		Delegating
		Proud of work
		Build trust
		Make connections
		Confidence
		Rely on teachers
		Trust until you cannot
Challenges	Money and Resources	More coaches/mentors/personnel
		Specialized assistance
		Money
		More time for PLCs
		More time for planning
		Resources needed
		Finances needed
	Ownership and Data Usage	Negativity
		Teachers second guess their role
		Need to grow in data use
		No ownership in vision
		Non-common assessments for data
		No parental support
		Teachers not differentiating lessons
		Not believing
	Differentiate for Teachers	Purposeful
		Student need
		Meeting teacher needs
		Varied assistance for teachers
		Need-based support
		Data for decision-making

Four major themes and 16 sub-themes emerged from the data analysis. The major themes were leadership responsibilities to support sustaining PLCs, best practices for collaboration and instruction, building capacity in teacher leaders, and challenges in sustaining PLCs. Through this analysis, I was able to develop a synthesized description of the

administrators' experience with the phenomenon being explored to provide "the synthesis of meanings and essences of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 184). Administrators' lived experiences with sustaining professional learning communities in their school settings will be expressed by defining and exploring research questions guiding this study. Additionally, themes and sub-themes of the participants' experiences are discussed in relation to the research questions.

Theme One: Leadership Responsibilities to Support Sustaining PLCs

The first theme developed understanding of research question one that sought to discover how administrators perceive their role in sustaining PLCs in Louisiana schools. Participant responses outline ways administrators identify their roles in sustaining PLCs within their school settings. Administrators shared ways their leadership style impacts their ability to sustain PLCs in their schools. Principals shared their experiences and characteristics viewed as supportive to sustaining PLCs, which included visibility, focus, communication, and involvement.

Servant leadership. The first identified sub-theme was servant leadership. Several participants spoke about providing teachers with the resources they need to do their job well. Servant leadership was noted as the self-identified leadership style of six of the 14 participants. The consistent accord was that the responsibility of the administrators is to serve their faculty and staff in whatever capacity necessary to make the school run smoothly for all stakeholders. Gerald characterized his leadership style as being a servant leader who is supportive of his faculty members' needs and strives to assist them in achieving their goals by reaching their full potential as teachers. He also encourages his faculty to try different things, to "move from their comfort zone. . . to take on new challenges in the spirit of growth as a professional [and] . . .

never let them settle for mediocrity as an educator," hoping these expectations will transfer into their personal lives to help them to be better individuals overall. Gerald further noted that:

> My leadership style is I work for my teachers. I work for my custodians. I work for my secretaries. I work for everybody here. They don't work for me. It's my job to make sure that I provide them with the training, the resources, whatever it is to support what they need in order to do their job, so I take that approach in leadership is saying, 'What do you need? How can I help you to be better?' and because of that, I see that the teachers really buy into it. They will say, 'Hey I need this. I need that,' and I do everything I can to kind of support them with that.

Hannah also noted the desire for her leadership style to impact the lives of her faculty outside of the school setting stating, "I would hope they would also see me as motivational for both them and the students. I would hope that I pushed them to be their best...not just in the classroom but life overall-positive and uplifting."

Jesse also identified as a servant leader and expressed how this leadership style helps him to share success and struggles with his faculty and noted, "Being a servant leader, I don't feel that the success of the school solely belongs to me, it belongs to us." Similarly, in expressing his leadership style, Marion considers himself a "nurturer" who is "more hands-on." Being a pastor also gives Marion a unique experience as an administrator where he uses the variety of roles he plays in his ministry to impact his leadership style in his school. He expressed that:

> As a pastor you have the role as the shepherd of the flock, and so you have a tendency to be a protector, a provider, a supporter, a good listener, and of course you also have tough conversations. You have to be direct. You have to still monitor what you expect to get done, but you also have to recognize that you're a team. I'm not a one man show.

Faith also plays a significant role in Hannah's leadership style. She tries to engage in Christian principles when making decisions that will impact her faculty and students. When addressing the role her faith plays in her leadership style, Hannah said

> I try to find ways that I can connect with my staff. I try to find ways to be genuine with them. I try to understand. I try to think as a person you know. Honestly, I have a very strong faith, and so I always try to think like what would Jesus do because that honestly that is the best way that's always guided me. I just always kind of say you know how would, honestly, how the Christian approach this, a true Christian, and how would they handle this, and what's fair, and when are being taken advantage of? When does somebody need that extra piece of positivity? So, I'm really trying to make sure that I'm fair, that I'm honest. Just like I said, I try to operate as my faith guides me, as a Christian, and I find when I do, that my relationships are strong. I try to think about people, put people first . . . I try to learn something from everybody even if it's something negative I want to take that and figure out how I can add that to my leadership to better serve them.

The idea of not being alone in the endeavors of running a school but approaching it as a team effort and serving the faculty and staff to the best of their abilities was apparent in the experiences of the administrators who identified with servant leadership.

Shared leadership. Distributing, delegating, and sharing leadership was another style of leadership five of the administrators out of 14 identified with in this study. While he did not specifically state shared leadership as his primary style, Austin alluded to the concept of shared leadership when he noted that he has a good staff whom he believes in, and he allows teachers who are good at certain things to do what they want to do in relation to a variety of areas in facilitating the school jobs. However, he noted that this sometimes means people who are less

capable work on things that should be monitored more closely. Nonetheless, Austin feels confident in and sees the benefit of "allowing people to work towards their strength." By allowing his faculty to attempt tasks that may or may not be their strength, Austin supports an environment where people are more likely to step out of their comfort zones and take risks, which may be empowering to his faculty and staff. Some administrators may not be comfortable with shared leadership. Early in her career, Donna noted she was less willing to share leadership and preferred to take responsibility on herself to tackle necessary tasks, yet, with experience, she now considers herself to have a more shared leadership style because she sees the value in recognizing leaders within her team and utilizing their strengths through delegating responsibility and trusting the job will be done well. By modifying her leadership style to support a more collaborative environment, Donna is supporting their aspirations and trusting their abilities.

Barbara specifically discussed the idea of empowering her teachers and building capacity by seeking input from her faculty and making decisions as a team. She noted that she has a good faculty and leadership team and that she believes in them and trusts them. She said, "I don't think that I own all the knowledge just because I'm the principal." On the other hand, while Francis identified her leadership style as being shared, she also alluded to a tough love approach when serving her faculty stating she is "going to do things because it's what they need, but it's not popular because it's not what they want . . . What they want is not what they need, and my job is to do what they need." Understanding that sometimes as an administrator that making difficult decisions is necessary likely makes sharing responsibilities easier. This is especially true when the situation supports a shared approach because the faculty and staff understand the expectations of working to a certain standard. Iris has come to understand the importance of

delegating and working together to collaborate in a democratic manner because the shifts in education have made too exhausting for everything to begin and end with one individual whether that is a teacher or administrator. As a result, she works to have a school climate that converses and collaborates to make everyone feel part of the school vision. This focus on shared communication for common goals may help educators work through some of the current changes in education and share the workload required to implement them. Similarly, transparent and shared leadership was significant to Lori who feels her campus this year has embraced transparent and shared leadership among faculty, students, and parents so they may focus on improving student achievement. Focusing on goals and working to support one another to impact student learning is a team effort in shared leadership. Nancy also identified her leadership style as being shared, but she is leery to place too much responsibility in one person's hands because it is always possible that person may move into a different role; therefore, she values having someone else who has the necessary information or can step into that role if needed.

Student-oriented. While all administrators have the best interest of their students at the forefront from the experiences they shared, some identified specifically as having s student-oriented focus in leadership. Caroline said, "I would hope my employees would state that I always put the kids first." Focus for Caroline's leadership style is apparently on the students, but she also demonstrates how she has structure her school to best meet the needs of not only the students but also the faculty through her willingness to work side by side with them to attain their common goals. Comparably, Evelyn clearly expressed her focus on student-oriented leadership knowing that sometimes she has to make hard decisions. She stated,

> Don't get me wrong, there are times when I have to lay down this rule, or I have to lay down this procedure, and that's just how it is, but my teachers and staff know that the decisions that I make are based off of what my students need, what they need, and what the school needs, and they'll tell you, it's in that order: students, teachers, and then the school.

Evelyn's focus on what is best for students sets a clear precedent her school that she and her faculty are there for the benefit of their students and that student success is the primary goal. When Kathy began as an administrator, she was so boggled down with managerial tasks that she was just trying to stay afloat and really could not tap into a specific leadership style because she was just trying to survive, but now she identifies as being a student-focused leader explaining,

> Well I think I'm a very student oriented. I'm all about the students. Like I'm going to make whatever decision I have to make about the students whether the teachers like it, or the parents like it, or central office likes it. I mean I'm just going to do what's best for kids. But when I first started I was really just swimming keeping my head above water. So, I was just really just, it was really more about managing, and I was just doing the paperwork, doing the paperwork, doing the paperwork, making sure the discipline was under control, and I really was not focusing on curriculum that much. I was at a tough school. It wasn't that we didn't have a good relationship with the teachers, but had a great relationship with the students, but I was just surviving. I mean I was at work until 1:00, 2:00 in the morning, and I was never really making any leeway.

After years of experience, Kathy has honed her abilities to manage the school expectations and responsibilities and be student-focused that places student success as her primary focus.

Overall, on the survey/questionnaire, administrators rated themselves high, with average of 3.57, in the category of Shared and Supportive Leadership. The statements regarding their leadership style supported this data collected to self-assess their feelings in that category (see Table 6). Most participants did not choose to elaborate on the survey/questionnaire by making comments on the sections; however, Francis did note comments for each. In relation to Shared and Supportive Leadership, Francis wrote,

> I believe in shared leadership. However, you can't expect more out of a teacher/staff member than they are capable of, so that must be scaffolded and built upon before complete release. My staff members typically make decisions based on their needs and not that of the whole student body.

Francis ranked shared and supportive leadership at her school as a 3.18 out of 4, only strongly disagreeing with the idea that stakeholders share responsibility and accountability for student learning. No other administrators rated the statement "Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority" by disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, but nine of the other 13 agreed instead of strongly agreeing.

Table 6

PLCA-R Instrument Results for Shared & Supportive Leadership

Principal	Shared & Supportive Leadership
Austin	3.36
Barbara	3.64
Caroline	4
Donna	3.82
Evelyn	3.36
Francis	3.18
Gerald	3.64
Hannah	3.91
Iris	3.64
Jesse	3.18
Kathy	3.27
Lori	3.82
Marion	3.45
Nancy	3.64
Total Average	3.57

Regardless of the leadership style with which participants identified, all the administrators'

leadership styles supported positively impacting student achievement and promoting a

collaborative school climate with common focus on success. Hannah noted in her mind map

under the section for "Leader" the concepts of "Data (Instructional/Assessment)" and "School

Culture/Climate" to denote how she determines the principal's role impacts those areas (Figure

2). This graphic shows how the leader, students, and teachers work together using data within

the PLC structures, which supports ideas Hannah presented in her interview and focus group

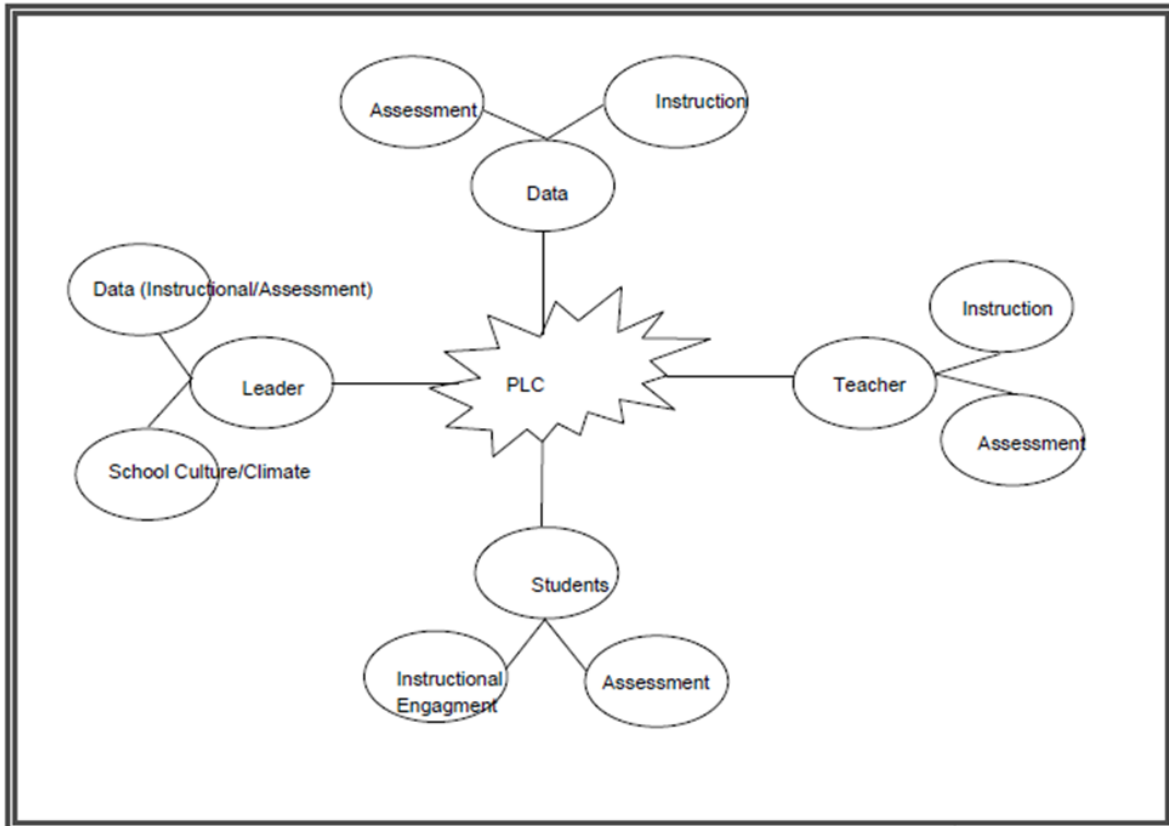interview regarding leadership and PLCs.

Figure 2: A mind map created by Hannah on her perceptions of PLCs and her experiences with PLCs.

Administrator visibility. Another area participants agreed was important to sustaining PLCs is being visible with faculty and staff. Barbara's school has weekly cluster meetings where she regularly interacts with her faculty. Barbara said, "I start out my day walking the halls and just talking to my teachers you. How are you? How's everything going? Do you need anything from me?" Likewise, Caroline noted the importance of being visible on campus. She said, "I try to always be very visible here at school during the day, very open-door policy. I always tell them you have problems, I have solutions. Bring me your problems, I'll help you figure out a solution to them". Similarly, Hannah said she is visible by, "saying good morning and just trying to have that positive outlook . . . [to] set the tone, so whether I feel like it or not I'm going to have my face on and I'm going to be here."

A visible presence supports a school climate of collaboration because administrators can build positive relationships with their faculty. Iris expressed her thoughts regarding being visible on her campus by saying,

I feel just having a presence and being visible and giving them feedback and taking into consideration their thoughts, their ideas, and just being receptive to their thoughts and their ideas as well has helped to build that relationship. People say open door policy. I'm not going to say that I have an open-door policy, but they know that I'm approachable, so, I feel like what we've created here is an environment that is extremely positive because I've been a lot of places and I've experienced a lot of different pains, and I would say it's very positive.

Iris's statement shared how she believes being approachable builds relationships and supports a positive culture within the school. Kathy also shared her thoughts on being visible on her campus as a memory on how she learned from a previous administrator who told her,

When you walk down the halls even if you have a million things to do, and you're in a hurry, don't rush! Just walk slowly down the hall. Make sure that you're greeting students and teachers and making them think that you have time for them even though you have a million things in your head.

Participants saw visibility of administrators on campus as a valuable way to build positive relationships and create a school climate where administrators are approachable, and faculty and staff feel driven to strive for common goals.

Dedicated focus. When administrators focus on the structures and the importance of PLCs, faculty members are more drawn to value them as well. Evelyn is focused on being present in PLCs because when she was a master teacher, she did not have the support and

presence of administrators in her PLC meetings. She expressed the significance and value

administrators' attending PLC meetings for the school and student success by stating,

> I'm telling you . . . me being present in those meetings, and not only just sitting there and
> being present, but contributing to what the master teacher is saying, contributing to the
> conversations that are had, reiterating how important it is to look at your assessment
> guide, showing them that it's not just about pulling it from the air. Looking at your data
> to decide what the students need, who needs to be an intervention. It's not just your call
> on who you think needs to be. You know truly looking at the data, how you analyze the
> data. Being part of all of that is essential because I have 577 students, and maybe there's
> only a handful that I really can't tell you too much about, but I pretty much know most of
> the students, and if I were not in these meetings, and I were not talking to these teachers,
> then I would be left in the dark. And I wouldn't be able to have these conversations with
> teachers, to have these conversation in staff meetings because I wouldn't know.

Similarly, Hannah values understanding the data and how it relates to student needs and using

data to impact student achievement. In the focus group interview she used "#Ilovedata" to

represent her love of data noting, "my employees . . . would point to my love for data in all facets

of the school as well as my whims of ideas to better the educational process at school."

Likewise, Francis sees herself as "dedicated, relentless, data-driven, and always hopeful. . . I

never give up once I set my mind on something. Some would say that I opt for perfection in all

things that I do." In her mind map, Francis demonstrated clear focus with several terms that

support the PLC process, but what was most prevalent were the symbol of the sun with the word

"vision" inside of it and the image of a path with pawprints, their mascot is a tiger, walking the

path to college and career success (see Figure 3). Her experience with providing a unified idea

that supports her school vision showed the focus that Francis exhibits and demonstrated her drive to encourage success and progress in her school and student performance.
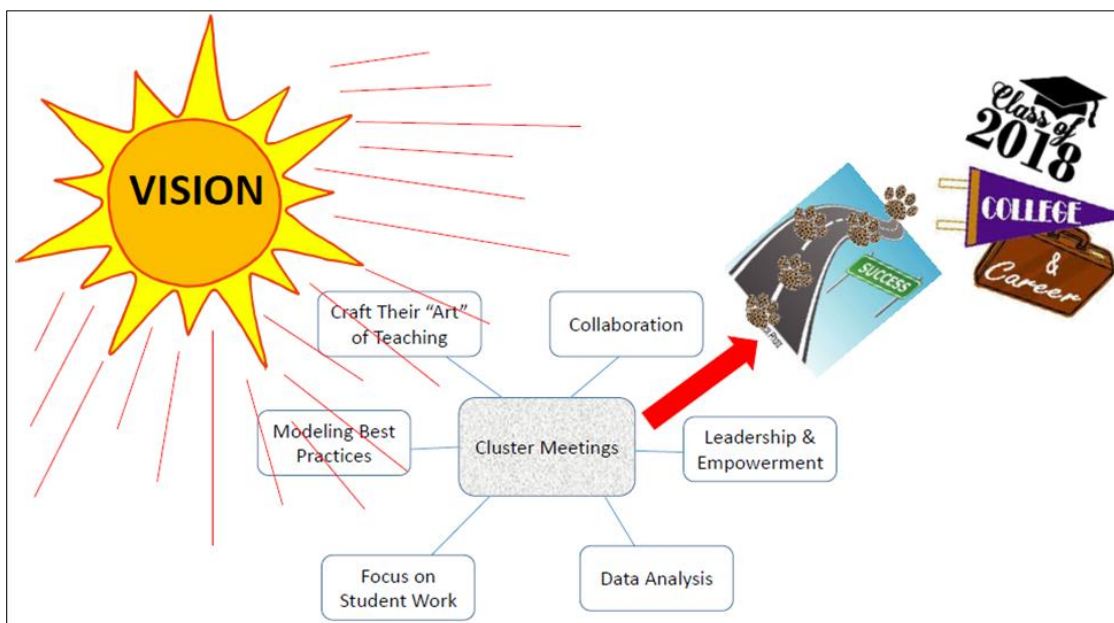

Figure 3: A mind map created by Francis on her perceptions of PLCs and her experiences with PLCs.

Communication. Communication was another area where administrators saw importance of being thorough and clear to positively impact the climate and performance of the school. According to Barbara, open communication is essential all the time unless the situation is emergent and does not allow for collaboration. She said,

> I'm really a big believer in communication. I don't really hide a lot, so I'm very transparent in everything that I'm doing, and I'd like to get their input because this is their school. I want them to tell me what's working and what is it not working. I'm very open. I think teachers know they can say anything to me and I'll listen. Sometimes I have to make a hard and fast decision and I do. I just believe in that open line of communication all the time.

Hannah also sees the value of open communication because she experienced principals who were not open communicators in her career, and she did not appreciate that style. She said, "I didn't

like I feel like I couldn't communicate, or they didn't want to hear what I had to say or anything."

Therefore, Hannah had developed her leadership style where she says, "I try to listen to people, I try to form relationships, but at the same time I understand the need for having strategies . . . [and] systems in place and having those things to make all systems go."

Hannah uses Google surveys to elicit feedback from her faculty and tries to use that feedback to better serve her school. In that regard, Hannah said,

> I think that factor of listening is huge . . . If I don't listen to their feedback, and they don't see the importance in what I'm doing, it won't sustain. They're not going to believe it to take it to the next level. People will do things, like they'll implement something, if they know I'm going to check it, but to really believe in it, they really need to know that we're listening to what they're saying; we're taking their feedback.

Jesse also noted the value of having the teachers who are doing the bulk of what is necessary to impact student achievement to be aware of what is happening in the school, and the administration needs to listen to feedback and said, "The person at the top knows the person at the bottom is doing all the work. so, the information has a flow and has flowed down but then it has to go back up, so you get feedback." Lori mentioned how working in isolation does not work in her school setting, but on the contrary, she values and open-door policy where "teachers do feel comfortable coming to talk to [her] about things or any issues or concerns that they have on campus." Participants' experiences show that these open lines of communication allow teachers to develop an understanding of expectations and feel a level of comfort in expressing concerns to their administrators.

Involvement. Being involved in planning and PLCs is imperative for administrators to be well-versed in what is going on with the teachers and students. When Barbara first arrived at

her school as an administrator, she inherited a PLC structure that was working well for the school. She was excited to be able to engage in the process with her new faculty and staff because she had seen various PLCs not function well when she served as a master teacher. Part of the reason she went into administration was because she had had many principals in her career who had not performed to the level she would have liked, and Barbara thought she could do a better job, plus after serving as a master teacher, she wanted to have a greater role in the collaboration process. Thus, she was "very happy to be a part of it and having it build upon it and then it's exciting to come into something that is working well as opposed to having to come in and fix things." Currently, Barbara has a greater focus on the leadership team planning, which drives the focus for the teachers PLCs.

> Barbara is also very involved when teachers have issues to be addressed saying,
>
> They know any problem anything that comes up, I want it to know. I want to fix it, so I'm not one of those people who is very sensitive if something's going wrong. You can tell me. I need to know. I insist on knowing, so I can fix it. I like for my school to be a well-oiled machine. I want it to be functioning, and so, in order to do that, I need to be able to accept. They don't really criticize, not in an ugly way. They let me know if they're happy or they're not and what can be better.

Francis sets the tone for being involved by working diligently plan meaningful PLC with her assistant principal where she is able to monitor and give feedback to her teachers regarding PLC content. She uses detailed agendas and a formula for documenting high, medium, and low student work. Creating a supportive environment and giving necessary feedback provides structures for dealing with situations that arrive, which is necessary for success in sustaining collaborative environments. Hannah mentioned "that relationships are key" to successful

maintenance of PLC structures. She also shared that creating structures that continue is necessary, so she values growing teachers and helping them try things that may be out of their comfort zone, but she also works to let her faculty "know they are valuable and appreciated." Iris talked about having a system in place for helping teachers and putting structures in place, so they know why things are important.

Likewise, Jesse understood the importance of providing teachers with everything they need to experience success and said, "sometimes that's an ear where you're listening . . . sometimes it's a gentle pat on the back, sometimes it's a little stern, Let me close the door and yell at you for us get this straight" Marion also works to let his team know how valuable they are to the success of the school and said, "We let them know we're thankful that you're here, in this building, because you chose to be here. We chose you. I want to make sure they have everything that they think that they need." Further, Marion expressed how the teachers are the ones making the greatest impact on student achievement, so he said "I have to support the teachers . . . support their ideas . . . because the growth that we have, I give direct credit to them, because they're in there every day. They bring it every day." Although participants expressed different ways they felt being involved impacts the school environment, all realized the value of being present and approachable to their faculty.

Theme Two: Best Practices for Collaboration and Instruction

The second theme provides insight into research question two that sought to discover what structures administrators perceive necessary to sustain PLCs. School settings need to be created to support collaboration that is focused on student achievement. Developing a school culture where educators work together for common goals with administrator encouragement builds an environment conducive to positive relationships and attitudes that impact classroom

instruction (Owen, 2016). Administrators shared the value of incorporating time for purposeful

meeting, data-driven focus, and common vision for PLCs sustainability. These sub-themes

demonstrate key components of PLCs that make them meaningful within school settings.

Purposeful meeting. Principals are often able to put various structures in place that

support sustaining PLCs. One key component noted by participants that supports sustaining

PLCs is having protected time during the school day for teacher to collaborate. Participants

acknowledged the amount of work teachers have to complete, and that much of that work spills

over to hours outside of the school day thus creating time in the schedule for PLCs and

promoting their continuation. Barbara explained that they use coaches, computer lab teachers,

and interventionists to cover classroom teachers' classes so they may attend PLCs during the

day. It is not, however, enough just to have the time built in to day for teachers to meet and

collaborate but creating an environment of purposeful meeting is necessary for teachers to see

the meetings as beneficial and be engaged in sustaining them. Caroline tried to make PLCs more

meaningful in her school by trying:

> To streamline everything with the intention that it is purposeful to improving student
>
> achievement . . . go back and make connections to how what we are doing is purposeful and
>
> showing them how what they are discussing ties to that.

Francis works to be sure her staff members are well-aware of matters pertaining to them

and the school and creating a schedule that allows for regular meeting for collaboration.

Additionally, Francis understands that modifications need to be made if processes that are in

place are not garnering the desired results because she said,

> If it's not working, we tweak and adjust as necessary...and when I say we, I'm referring to
>
> the entire faculty. Through departmental meetings as well as cluster (PLC) meetings, all

teachers have the opportunity to contribute. Everything I do, every decision I make is based on the school vision. Every change to the master schedule or every intervention has the school vision at the forefront. Nothing is done on a whim. I model daily decision making based on the school vision.

Gerald strongly values the idea of creating a similar structure for supporting PLCs within his school with a clear purpose, and he explained how the process flows to best support purposeful and meaningful PLC meeting by saying,

I work on establishing a focused culture by differentiating the support needed for each teacher. Once the vision and goals of the school have been established; as an administrator, I have to determine each teacher's level of competency to contribute to the overall accomplishment of the goal and then provide them with the necessary support to reach it. I determine the support needed by having personal conversations with teachers about their needs, walk-throughs in the classroom, feedback form observations, and from discussions during collaboration. Once those support needs are determined I work to provide that support through various forms of PD, peer coaching, observation of other teachers, and various other resources.

Iris is also purposeful in her meetings with teachers to work toward school goals and uses evidence from their collaboration meetings the make decisions about next steps because she wants to understand how to share concepts with her teachers, so she can be a better leader.

Collaboration is the primary focus of PLCs and creating a school culture that supports this collaborative spirit is important to sustaining PLCs. Marion worked in a variety of roles and multiple school settings before becoming the principal of his current school. When he served as an assistant principal at his previous school, Marion noticed the way the school focused on

creating a schedule that ensured regular collaboration multiple times per week. He valued this

structure and decided to implement a similar structure in his school. Marion said,

> [W]e had gone from maybe one day a week, or once every two weeks collaboration time,
> to three days a week collaboration. Teachers hated it at first, but once they saw what we
> were doing and why we were doing it they started to buy in. They started to see that they
> were no longer isolated or on an island, so I came here and that was the only major
> change that I've made when I came my first year because when I came here I was new to
> the elementary world so to speak. I didn't know anybody. I had to learn where I was, but
> the thing that I did come here knowing was what good teaching looked like and what best
> practices look like.

Creating a culture of collaborative where teachers appreciate the time spent together working

towards common goals and learning how to implement best practices assists teachers in being

more effective by sharing the workload. While all of the participants provided protected time for

PLCs within their schools, they maintained a focus on collaboration. Marion had one of the most

thorough PLC structures of the participants. Marion discussed how the structure implemented at

his school allows teachers complete necessary tasks and still enjoy their lives outside of school

by sharing the workload since the requirements placed on teachers today are so vast. At

Marion's school, they meet on Mondays to review and "chart their data . . . [and] progress

monitor every student" for tests, common assessments, or activities they have completed the

week before and to analyze what skills need to be retaught to assist students in mastering the

standards." The school has the conference room outfitted and the school's data readily

accessible, so they can "take a look at the school at a glance." On Tuesday, teachers meet again

to utilize backwards design to develop the assessments for lessons they will plan for the

upcoming week. Then on Wednesday the teachers use this assessment, which is designed by

looking at the end goals of the unit, to develop lessons that will provide students the instruction

they need to master the skills necessary to successfully tackle the assessment. Marion said of

this process that, "It has just been remarkable!" Nancy also noted the importance of having these

structures built into the work day because teachers would rather complete the work during the

work day as opposed to staying after school by saying, "PLCs could continue to be sustainable

during the school day . . . [teachers] would be all in, I think, on any changes or adjustments we

needed to make continue to have them during the day." Using the structures with fidelity for all

teachers and making sure each person does his or her part is important. Having the time to meet

and the support of the principal in creating these collaboration time is valuable to sustaining

PLCs within the school setting.

Data-driven focus. Continuing with the idea of the collaboration meetings should be

purposeful, data-driven instruction provides a goal for which students and teachers can strive to

be successful in positively impacting student achievement. Jesse shared meeting PLC records

and document that provides a clear focus on data, even outlining the steps they have in place: (1)

collect and chart data, (2) analyze data and prioritize needs, (3) set, review, and revise

incremental SMART goals, (4) select common instructional strategies, (5) determine results

indicators, and (6) monitor and evaluate results. Many participants expressed the importance of

utilizing data in collaboration meetings to plan for and modify instructional practices to meet

student needs. Barbara desired to be a principal because she thought she could have a great

impact on a school by being more involved in the data analysis process. Barbara said, "I love the

data! I love to look at the test scores and . . . dig deep with the master teacher and . . . use that as

a guide . . . [to] my vision." Donna also noted that it is important to "review student work and share."

Hannah believes so greatly in the power of a data-driven focus that she and her curriculum teacher, like Marion, created an entire room for data that did not exist before she was principal of her school. Hannah's purpose in creating the data room was:

getting teachers to look at where we're going with things . . . constantly thinking about refinement and . . . reinforcement . . . What does that refine? What is that reinforcement? . . .What do we want our PLCs to look like in the future?

Using data regularly to decide how to intervene for students, they have a greater chance of being successful in mastering the grade level expectations. Lori communicated the same thoughts about aligning best practices in instruction and utilizing the data to develop next steps noting, "If you do not have data to support it, it doesn't make sense." Marion also felt a direct correlation between data-driven instruction and PLCs provides a purposeful focus and positively impacts student achievement. Marion shared,

I think our PLCs have had a direct impact on our school performance and our growth. I do believe that, and through the PLC process, we were able to develop a really good intervention model for our school, and that has been tremendous in terms of helping us to achieve . . . the past two years.

This focus on data in PLCs also led Marion to share that he requires teachers in the lower grades to understand and prepare students for expectations of the future grades because "It is not the responsibility of third grade teachers, once kids get to be third grade, to prepare them for high stakes testing. That starts in the PK class, so we've been real strategic about implementing systemic practices." Schools that use these collaboration meetings for data-driven instruction

and vertically aligned planning can better prepare students for the expectations ahead by providing a common vision for the teachers to work toward to promote school and student success.

One data source all administrators referenced was test scores and school performance scores from the Louisiana Department of Education. Test scores of individual students and movement of below-level students are criteria that impact school performance scores. Nine of 14 schools saw improvement in their school performance scores from 2013 to 2016 (see Table 7). Several even saw increases by double-digits, though that did not always equate to moving to the next letter assignment. Using these performance scores and individual student test scores, PLC groups can create a focus and develop a plan for encouraging student success on the end-of-the-year standardized tests. Participants noted various other data measures analyzed in PLCs, such as district purchased programs that progress monitor student performance, to aid in the development of instruction and intervention that would best meet student needs and assist in their mastering necessary skills to be successful on grade-level assessments. In addition to demonstrating increased student achievement, this focus on the data allows teachers to collaborate on classroom assignments and activities that then serve as additional data resources. According to administrators' experiences, these common expectations in relation to data provide teachers a means of working on the right work together to advance student mastery.

Table 7

Historical Letter Grade and SPS Data by School

School	2016 Letter	2016 SPS	2015 Letter	2015 SPS	2014 Letter	2014 SPS	2013 Letter	2013 SPS	Difference 2013-2016
Bayou High	A	103.5	A	106	B	95.3	C	84.7	18.8
Cajun Elementary	B	90.5	B	89.3	C	80.6	B	85	5.5
Dome Middle	C	69.3	D	56	C	80.3	C	80.7	-11.4
Etouffee High	B	90.6	C	76.3	C	81.5	C	73.7	16.9
French Magnet	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Gumbo High	D	67	D	56.2	D	59.8	D	58.5	8.5
Heritage Elementary	C	76.7	C	77.7	C	75.5	C	77.8	-1.1
Iris Elementary	C	79.4	C	77.3	C	80.9	C	82.3	-2.9
Jazz Middle	C	73.6	D	59.3	C	76	D	67.8	5.8
Krewe High	C	83.6	B	88.2	B	89.2	C	82.2	1.4
Lagniappe Elementary	B	90.3	C	81.9	B	87.3	D	68.9	21.4
Mirliton Middle	D	64	D	64.9	C	77.9	D	64.8	-0.8
Napoleon Elementary	C	69.6	D	47.4	D	54.7	F	49.6	20
Okra Middle	D	64.1	D	64.8	D	66.4	D	57.8	6.3

Adapted from Louisiana, 2013-2016

Common vision. Providing a common vision for PLCs starts with the administrator

because they set the tone for the whole school on how they will react and value the PLC

structure. Evelyn, who was a master teacher before becoming a principal, said, "I promise you

that it is so key having an administrator in your clusters because sometimes the teachers think

this is just another hour in my day." Francis also values supporting a common vision and noted

that she hopes her teachers will say she "taught them that all things are possible when everyone

comes together for a common good." Accordingly, when principals promote a common vision within their schools, PLC sustainability becomes ingrained in the teachers, and they recognize its purpose and value. Gerald believes the PLC structures they have in place and the common vision of the school has caused his teachers to take ownership of the process to the extent that he said, "if I left tomorrow and a new principal came in and said we want to take away it is that they would fight for it, so they want it, so that's why it stays in place." Further, Gerald pointed out that teachers are seeing the importance of PLCs because he said,

> We're having success with collaboration. There's no griping about going to collaboration, no one showing up 10 minutes late or anything . . . They're in there with their data and . . . I'm looking at what they need to look at, so I think that's the biggest piece of why it continues, and it is being maintained because they want it.

Gerald's belief that teachers would take ownership and fight for the PLCs if he was gone demonstrates that common vision is supported by everyone at the school, and everyone feels they play a part in its existence. Documentation of the ownership Gerald's teachers feel for the PLC meetings was evident in the documents that he shared for their leadership team and PLC grade/subject level meetings. The continuum of the school's vision was clearly focused on student achievement and ways to best assist teachers in providing the necessary instruction to master required skills.

Additionally, in his mind map, Gerald used a picture of people hand-in-hand around the term "common purpose" to express the value of everyone coming together for a common purpose in PLCs. There were two heads with arrows pointing between them and a light bulb with thinking bubbles above one head to signify collaboration and development of ideas between members (see Figure 3). These visual representations Gerald shared were echoed in the ideas of

other participants. Working together to share the work and move students forward by using a

common focus was evident in the experiences of participants.

Figure 4: A mind map created by Gerald on his perceptions of PLCs and his experiences
with PLCs.

Hannah also noted the value of the teachers taking ownership of the PLC process saying,

"everyone has to believe in it, so everyone has to have success with what you're doing." To

further express her feelings about sustainability of the PLC process in her school, Hannah

explained why she believes the structures in place will continue by saying,

It has to be something they can take back, they can use, and they can see that it's working,

and then I think that everybody needs to feel a part . . . to feel important and that they're

part of that sustainability. I think you have to get everybody to believe and that's

something I've just finished the NISL project the principal fellowship and it was talking

about sustainability and how you make things happen when you're gone, and so I've thought about that a lot. Like if something happened tomorrow would my school go on without me, but I think about a lot of my staff members, and I feel like they believe in themselves. They believe in each other, and so I feel like any one could pick up the torch and say, 'Alright y'all we've got to get this going!' I feel like they all believe in what our vision and our focus.

Creating a common vision goes hand in hand with a data-driven focus because the teachers focus on needs of students based on their data. In addition, the administration can look at the teachers' needs to make decisions on how to best help them, whether that be articles or feedback that assists the teacher in reaching her fullest potential in making the greatest impact on the school by meeting expectations that have been clearly outlined. Also, creating a common vision requires understanding the faculty "really analyzing the staff, staff needs, and ways to create the culture desired within the school-look at the data and see where it leads. Happy teachers make for teachers who are more willing to participate." While there are structures that need to be in place to support a common vision, Iris noted, "There's just no magic. It's just knowing what it is that you want and why. Everybody has to believe and be on the same page." However, following up on what is expected and put in place is necessary because "Fully implementing means that somebody is checking that." When school leaders show the value in PLCs, understand the importance of the process put in place, and follow up on those expectations, teachers are more likely to see the value in these measures.

Kathy noted that when teachers first began to meet for PLCs they would share common data like standardized test scores but were afraid to share their individual student work because they did not want to be criticize for the level of expectation of the work. However, now "they

feel safer sharing it because nobody can say, "Well, why are you doing that?" or "That's not even a rigorous activity" because now that everybody's really working together, and they are pretty much doing the same thing." Analyzing the documents Kathy provided shows that this common vison where the team introduces a concept one week and follows up with that concept the following week, really is beginning in the leadership team meeting and with the administrator's involvement. These ideas are being carried over into the PLC meetings to best support teachers in creating common assessments that allow them to analyze and understand student performance more effectively (Kathy, documents). This shared vision and responsibility allows teachers to have "ownership and . . . a level of pride . . . [it] alleviates their workload and encourages them want to continue to work as a team. . . [to] divide and conquer, . . . so that's a huge plus." With the changes in education today, teachers are often tasked with more responsibilities, so having a common vision and working as a team will likely assist teachers in more effectively accomplishing their goals. Overall on the survey/questionnaire, administrators rated themselves fairly high, with average of 3.61, in the category of Supportive Conditions- Structures, and their statements regarding structures they have in place to sustain PLCs support this data collected to self-assess their feelings in that category (see Table 7).

Theme Three: Building Capacity in Teacher Leaders

Theme three provides insight into research question three that sought to explore how administrators support an environment conducive to sustaining PLCs. Administrators discussed supports they have in place to sustain PLCs within their school settings, and these supports encourage capacity building among their faculty members. Three sub-themes encouraging strengths, understanding limitations, and developing trust were areas that participants described as necessary to sustaining PLCs in their school environments.

Encouraging strengths. Administrators must be willing to allow their faculty members to step out and try new things and be willing to give them responsibilities that allow them to showcase their talents in effort to build capacity in their school settings. Austin's approach to leadership allows his teachers to feel comfortable in completing task to the best of their ability. He said, "they know that if they are willing to work they will be able to do their thing per se . . . they are not scared to make a mistake, and they are not scared to try things." Allowing teachers to explore different interests and invest in their newly-found skills not only empowers teachers trying new things but can impact other teachers as well. Francis also expressed the importance of building capacity and encouraging teachers to demonstrate their strengths when she said,

> Building capacity is key to shared leadership. I try to find the strengths of individuals and capitalize on them by correlating their strength to a task that I need done. Typically, teachers will revel in opportunities to show off a particular strength they possess. I differentiate tasks that I assign to teachers depending on their capability. During leadership team meetings, for example, everyone has the same opportunity to contribute ideas and most of the time, it's not my ideas that we use. We use the ideas of the front-line people. By building capacity in teachers, they feel more empowered. They feel like I trust them and their opinion enough when I delegate to them. Also, teachers are more willing to accept new ideas and new things if a fellow colleague has been involved in its creation. Building capacity has made the bond I have with certain teachers stronger. The teachers who are willing to take on additional responsibility feel like I have faith in their ability and they support our school initiatives more when they are directly involved.

All of the participants expressed the benefit of building capacity in their schools, yet Kathy noted that sometimes she will decide to do things herself because she does not want to overextend the teachers. Kathy noted she should ask just to see if anyone may be interested.

Iris felt she has developed a balanced approach to building capacity in her school but that it has taken a while for her to accomplish. Iris said,

> I found the groove in terms of how to sustain a school . . . making sure that there's stability and capacity building and that everyone feels a part of the vision and that we're all looking at what's best for kids, and I think it's taken me really 20 years for it to kind of come full circle.

Utilizing the capacity that has been built in their schools, Lori and Nancy both utilized their personnel they have to support PLCs structures by relying on their curriculum coach to facilitate the PLCs. Marion understood the purpose of empowering teacher leaders and allowing them to do new things because:

> Some of them do aspire to maybe do other things, come out of the classroom one day, and so in order for them to get the experience they need, to give them opportunities to do that and grow to learn, to make mistakes, to be reflective, to see what I can do to improve my practice. If you never get an opportunity, you never trust them to make mistakes, you've got to give them an opportunity.

Knowing that some teacher leaders have higher aspirations, Marion said, "I'm very supportive of them. I give them an opportunity . . . I do believe in letting them exercise their strengths and exercise their skill set." Allowing teachers to exercise their skills in varying areas builds capacity in the school and can also build capacity in school districts as teachers move into administrative positions.

Understanding limitations. While many educators may want to extend themselves and try new things, it is important that administrators identify strengths and weaknesses of their faculty when working to build capacity in their schools. Taking a person's abilities into account is necessary when building capacity. Gerald shared his method for building capacity in his school and how the structure builds leaders by explaining,

It is an absolute must that school administrators build capacity in all their employees. The logistics of running a school effectively cannot be done by the administration alone, there must be others on the campus whose competencies have been developed and then empowered to make decisions in the best interest of the students. In general, I build capacity in every employee including administrators, custodians, paraprofessionals, secretaries, and teachers. More specifically, for teachers we have four teacher leaders (two for third and fourth grade ELA/SS and two for third and fourth grade Math/Sci), 1 special education lead teacher, and 1 curriculum coach all of which serve on our leadership team for three years. After three years they rotate out and based partly on their recommendation new teachers are selected to serve. Serving in a leadership role broadens their perspective and develops their buy-in leading the school. This impacts collaboration in a positive manner because they are able to discuss and communicate decisions to other teachers as their peer which again leads to more buy-in from the faculty. I also focus on building capacity in the area of curriculum by having planning teams meet each six weeks to develop assessments, adjust long range plans, review data and make recommendations for next steps. These teams also rotate giving every teacher the opportunity to be a part of the process. I think the biggest impact on collaboration is

that there is more trust by the faculty in the decisions being made when they have all the

information because they have been a part of the process from the beginning.

This process Gerald shared seems to impact the school and its faculty positively. Nevertheless,

the importance of understanding where each person is in the process because as Iris noted,

"I'm always very cognizant that I have to understand where teachers are coming from as well. It

has to make sense to them."

When looking to build capacity, Kathy noted that she sometimes shies away from asking

teachers to do things because she know that their workload is extensive. She said,

I will tend to not ask them to do things because I know how busy they are, and I'm like

I'll just do it, but really, I should say, 'Is anybody interested in doing it?' because I might

have somebody who's like, 'I'd love to do that,' but I tend to do a lot of stuff myself

because I'm thinking they don't have time for it. Look how much stuff they are doing in

their classroom. They can't stay after school and do this, but really, I should at least offer

it because their might be somebody who wants to work on testing until 7:00 at night.

Having relationships with faculty members and understanding their strengths and weaknesses

can make deciding who to ask to lead a task easier because "actually building that relationship

with your faculty and knowing who will serve best works to build capacity." Developing a

culture of understanding can allow administrators to support teachers in their endeavors to better

themselves in their profession and hone trust among administration and staff to accomplish the

tasks set before them.

Developing trust. Trust must be a two-way street in all aspects of life, but in the

education realm, administrators must trust in the abilities of their faculty and faculty members

must trust their administrators to provide them with opportunities suited to their abilities in

addition to trusting themselves to carry out what their administrators expect of them. Donna acknowledged the value in "creating that team to where you can feel good and trust delegating and know that those things are going to be taken care of and that you'll be proud of the work that they've done as well." The creation of a team she can trust was evident in the meeting records Donna shared. They also showed her team models and provided concepts that are brought to the PLC meetings for teachers to utilize and reflect on before coming to the next PLC meeting. Implementing this trust is a team effort, and actions cannot be demanded by the administrator if the goal is the creation of a collaborative culture. Donna further elaborated on the idea of trust by stating,

> I trust the people around me to do the job that they have been given and do them to the best of their ability, so, that we need to talk about whether that can be better, that we're all in it together. It's not me the principal, and you're going to do what I say because I am the principal. It's we're a team, and this is our school, and we all are trying to build each other and make each other look good, but ultimately making the school and the students look good.

The importance of building trust when she first became administrator of her school was clear when Evelyn mentioned, "I had to build the trust. If you do not have trust with your staff you're done. You're done as the leader, so I had to build up that trust first." Administrators who create a supportive environment can develop capacity within their school and empower teacher leaders to "build that trust and you can rely on your teacher leaders." When expressing his feelings about trusting his faculty, Jesse said, "I like to trust my people until they tell me that, or they make me believe that, I can't trust them." Therefore, creating these supportive environments and allowing teachers to take an initiative to lead and build capacity in the school can be powerful in creating a

culture of support and trust that is necessary for educators to achieve their full potential. However, regardless of administrators' leadership responsibilities, best practices, and capacity building, challenges may arise in sustaining PLCs that administrators must grapple with to keep the focus on collaboration within their schools.

For the category Supportive Conditions on the survey/questionnaire, participants rated statements related to the topic with results averaging 3.44 for Relationships and 3.61 for Structures on a four-point scale. In relation to relationships, Francis noted, "We examine data regularly. The issue that teachers don't believe, in general, that what they do matters more than what parents don't do. They don't realize the power in their roles." Under the sub-themes for building capacity, six administrators discussed the importance of supporting teacher leaders in exercising their strengths in leadership roles. Additionally, six administrators also shared how understanding the capabilities of their staff is important in capacity building. Likewise, four administrators denoted the value of developing trust with faculty. These areas seem to speak to that lack of belief teachers may experience because they are not yet sure of their abilities. This lack of confidence may have an impact on the areas addressed in the survey/questionnaire.

Table 8

PLCA-R Instrument Results for Supportive Conditions – Relationships and Structures

Principal	Supportive Conditions - Relationships	Supportive Conditions- Structures
Austin	3.6	2.75
Barbara	3.4	3.75
Caroline	4	3.75
Donna	3.6	4
Evelyn	3	3
Francis	2.6	4
Gerald	3.6	4
Hannah	4	4
Iris	3.8	3.5
Jesse	3.2	2.25
Kathy	3.2	4
Lori	3	3.75
Marion	4	3.75
Nancy	3.2	4
Total Average	3.44	3.61

Theme Four: Challenges in Sustaining PLCs

The fourth theme to emerge enhanced knowledge regarding question four that sought to address what challenges administrators face in sustaining PLCs. Participants shared challenges they encountered in relation to identified themes and how these challenges may impede success in sustaining PLCs within their school settings. The three categories identified as challenges were money and resources, ownership and data usage, and differentiation for teachers.

Money and resources. Many things in life, even worthwhile endeavors, come with challenges. Some of the participants shared challenges they face in sustaining PLCs. Austin

spoke of the need for "coaches and mentors" to lighten the load of the teachers because often those who take the lead in his school "already have other responsibilities, and because they are good, you give them more responsibilities." Money and time are challenges Barbara felt may impede sustaining PLCs because when they first began implementing PLCs, she had more personnel at her disposal to assist in covering classes so the teachers could attend PLC meetings. However, now that her personnel have been cut, their PLCs have gone from 90 minutes to 60. Barbara also noted that when they received the grant that paid for her school to be part of the TAP program, teachers received performance-based incentive payouts, but they no longer receive that do to funding. While Barbara said, "teachers here really don't work for the pay, but I think it does make a difference. I think it's deserved! With the amount of work that they put in, they should get some sort of incentive." Time was also an issue noted by Donna to be able to do all of what needs to be done in PLCs and be effective. Nancy mirrored these challenges and noted having "more time and more curriculum coaches" because while she does currently have two curriculum coaches, one for ELA and social studies and another for math and science, Nancy said she "could do with having one per subject area per core subject area." Additionally, Nancy noted increased technology in the form of laptops to get the information out to the students efficiently would beneficial.

Ownership and data usage. Participants discussed all the ways they work to sustain PLCs in their school, yet sometimes they still struggle with faculty taking ownership of their responsibilities regarding PLCs. Data was a concern for Austin who said, "that is an area where we still have some work to do." Kathy expressed that while they have a clear focus on data, they often struggle with what work teachers choose to bring because "if you don't bring the same assignment then it doesn't matter if you compare your multiple-choice test to [a] writing

prompt." However, as they have worked to create a more collaborative environment and share work with one another, they have had a bit more success with their data analysis. Evelyn noted that there has been a shift the school's culture, and she was experiencing some negativity among her staff.

When discussing why teachers may not fully take ownership and believe in their abilities, Francis explained that the parents are not supportive of the teachers and feel the students are the responsibility of the teachers during the day. However, she commented that, "The issue is that teachers don't believe, in general, that what they do matters more than what parents don't do. They don't realize the power in their roles." Teachers should believe in themselves and support a positive belief in one's abilities with their students because, as Hannah remarked, "if our kids don't believe they're going to make mastery or advanced they're not."

On the survey/questionnaire, participants rated statements related to corresponding topics with results averaging 3.54 for Shared Values and Vision, 3.52 for Collective learning and Application, and 3.54 for Shared Personal Practice on a four-point scale. Again, the only participant who elaborated on the scores with commentary was Francis. She noted for Shared Values and Vision that, "In general, all staff support the school vision. The issue we have is that many teachers do not take ownership of their role in realizing the vision and bringing it to fruition." Not taking ownership and data usage were noted by five other administrators as challenges they face in sustaining PLCs. Administrators acknowledged using data in PLCs despite the challenge. In relation to Collective Learning and Application, Francis shared:

> We have no support from parents at all. It is a mindset that during the day students are our problem. Teachers do not differentiate their lessons enough or at all. They will say that they believe they should, but they don't do it in the classroom.

The experience Francis has with teachers not taking ownership of their role in impacting student

achievement may relate to the lack of parental support. Lastly, for Shared Personal Practice,

Francis said, "The focus in every cluster is student work. Teachers are required to chart, analyze,

and discuss student work. We also employ a schoolwide writing strategy."

Table 9

PLCA-R Instrument Results for Values & Vision, Learning & Application, and Personal Practice

Principal	Shared Values & Vision	Collective Learning & Application	Shared Personal Practice
Austin	3.33	3.3	3
Barbara	3.78	3.7	3.42
Caroline	4	4	3.71
Donna	3.78	3.8	3.86
Evelyn	3.22	3.2	3
Francis	3.44	2.8	3.57
Gerald	3.11	3.9	4
Hannah	4	3.7	3.71
Iris	3.44	3.8	3.86
Jesse	3.22	3	2.86
Kathy	3.11	3.1	3.29
Lori	3.67	3.5	3.86
Marion	4	4	4
Nancy	3.44	3.5	3.43
Total Average	3.54	3.52	3.54

Differentiation for teachers. Caroline works to differentiate her feedback and

assistance for her teachers and said, "Just like we differentiate for our students, we should

differentiate for our teachers . . . everything we do should be purposeful . . . This way

everyone's needs are met!"   However, other participants struggled with differentiating the PLCs

to meet the needs of the teachers. Francis explained that differentiation is still a work in progress, but she expressed some of the ways she works to differentiate for her teachers by noting,

> As of now, our clusters (PLCs) are not differentiated as a whole. Everyone receives the same training weekly based on overall school data and observations. I model best practices in my daily practices as well as when I give training or meetings. I provide teachers with support to best practices through peer coaching from my teacher leaders. We use data-driven instruction daily. Our HML Charts and student work are based on data analysis. Currently, we are continuing our study of high quality analysis of student work. We do informal observations regularly whereby observation and feedback is given to individual teachers on how they can best strengthen their instruction. We always refer to some kind of data as the purpose and rationale for any changes or adjustments that are made. By focusing on the data, I have found my teachers feel less threatened. They still don't like it so much when it is called out, but they are a bit more receptive when we make the focus about student learning as opposed to what they are doing 'wrong.' We are still working to differentiate our support. It is indeed a work in progress. I personally struggle with finding the time to differentiate and meet the needs of all my teachers. Yes, instruction is important, but my job consists of so many other things that are mandatory as well. I utilize the post-conferences in the formal observations as a primary way to differentiate teacher support. Having those one on one conversations has been so valuable.

Hannah has worked to begin differentiating PLCs to better meet the needs of the teachers because a number of teachers had received instruction and guidance on implementing best

practices using the evaluation rubric, and they saw less benefit sitting in on meetings on a topic with which they were already familiar. Hannah and her curriculum coach began incorporating articles and virtual PLCs to better meet the needs of teachers and provide enrichment to teachers who are ready for challenges and assistance for those who still need support with the less intense concepts.

Research Question One

This first research question for this study sought to understand ways administrators identify their roles in sustaining PLCs within their school settings. Administrators' explanations of their roles in sustaining PLCs allowed the first theme, leadership responsibilities to support sustaining PLCs, to emerge, and seven sub-themes of servant leadership, shared leadership, student-oriented leadership, administrator visibility, dedicated focus, communication, and involvement were identified. Participants expressed their self-identified leadership style and shared how their leadership style supports students and teachers. Administrators described how their leadership style and involvement in the instructional practices positively impacted PLCs. Expressing the value of being present in PLCs Evelyn noted, "[Teachers] don't see the true meaning in it if the principal is not in there showing how much it is valued." Working together with a focus also demonstrates the essential role administrators play in sustaining PLCs. Caroline shared, "I don't mind getting in the trenches with them. I believe that we are all in this together." It is imperative that principals are visible, open, and involved in PLC processes for them to be valued and maintained. In the answer research question one, administrators shared experiences that demonstrated their belief in these components.

Research Question Two

The second research question explored structures administrators perceive necessary to sustain PLCs within their school settings. Principals shared structures they have in place to sustain PLCs that allowed the emergence of the second theme, best practices for collaboration and instruction, and three sub-themes were identified purposeful meeting, data-driven focus, and common vision. Caroline shared, "I put structures in place that holds everyone to the same standards and level of accountability." Having the PLC structure in place and working together towards common goals were significant areas for all participants. When just getting started with PLCs, Gerald's experience with establishing PLCs began with:

> Baby steps . . . first get the schedule set up where we have the time . . . get them used to at least talking about something in common . . . and so we just kept growing from there where we just added more and more of looking at assessments, looking at data, discussing strategies, all those things.

Participants' experiences demonstrate they support continuing PLCs and are willing to work as an instructional leader alongside the teachers as an integral part to sustain PLCs within their school settings.

Research Question Three

Research question three sought to understand supports administrators have in place to sustain PLCs within their school settings. Administrators shared supports they have in place that led to the third theme, building capacity in teacher leaders, and three sub-themes were identified encouraging strengths, understanding limitations, and developing trust. Caroline said, "Building capacity is the key to longevity! I really get to know my teachers to determine their strengths. I then use their strengths to help other teachers grow. I always ask of input of others before

making decisions." Yet, Marion noted to best utilize personnel and make the greatest impact on the school, "you have to know what their strengths and weaknesses are, and you have to kind of play on those strengths and in doing that you also encourage them to build on their areas of weakness." It is important for administrators to create a culture to "make those connections where people trust you and feel confident in you, and when they have that kind of confidence, when you ask them to do things they're like, "Yeah! Let's go!'"

Research Question Four

The fourth research question sought to develop understanding of the challenges administrators have in relation to identified themes and how these challenges may impede success in sustaining PLCs within their school settings. Administrators identified these challenges and three categories of money and resources, ownership and data usage, and differentiation for teachers were identified. Marion expressed the same sentiment by noting, "Just having a little bit more time for the planning and just being able to have all of the resources . . . [and] finances we need" would be helpful. Several participants also expressed their concern that teachers did not take ownership of their responsibilities in PLCs and that teachers do not always bring necessary data to PLC meetings. Teachers' varied needs led to the final challenge which was differentiating PLCs for based on teacher need. While some administrators expressed success with differentiation, others viewed it as a challenge.

<div align="center">

Summary

</div>

This chapter includes information on the lived experiences of 14 K-12 school administrators in sustaining PLCs within their schools. Using a survey/questionnaire, individual interviews, document analysis, a focus group interview, and a mind map, three main themes emerged: (a) leadership responsibilities to support sustaining PLCs, (b) best practices for

collaboration and instruction, and (c) building capacity in teacher leaders. Sub-themes for each

major theme developed ideas that where guided by the research questions. The first theme of

leadership responsivities explored the leadership style of each participant and ways the leaders

work to sustain PLCs within their schools. Sub-themes included various aspects of how

administrators support the collaborative structure of PLCs through visibility, focus,

communication, involvement, and support.

Stories shared by participants developed an understanding of their perceptions of their

responsibilities and roles in sustaining PLCs. While participant leadership styles varied, all

participants had a focus on provide what is necessary for the success of their faculty and

students. Their desire to demonstrate a style of leadership that supports collaboration and

improved achievement was apparent. Servant leadership was the identified style of several

participants because they were primarily concerned with providing teachers with everything

necessary to be successful in their endeavors to instruct students. Other administrators identified

more closely with having a shared or distributed leadership style where they allowed teachers to

work collaboratively for the vision and mission of the school by delegating responsibilities when

possible. Lastly, some participants expressed their leadership style as being student-oriented

where the students are the focus of all their decision-making processes. Even though these

leadership styles are varied with different primary foci, each demonstrated ways administrators

lead to sustain PLCs within their schools.

Administrators saw their role of being present as beneficial in setting precedent and a

tone for the importance of PLCs. This visibility lent itself to monitor and modeling expectations

for PLCs where administrators work alongside of teachers in enacting the collaborative culture

of the school. Maintaining focus on the goals and vision of the school was another area where

the participants' stories showed they work to sustain PLCs with their schools. By providing clear expectations and purposes, administrators can encourage their staff and receive buy in for the concepts they wish to enact. Communication of ideas must be clear and transparent, according the participants, so that faculty feel the administrators are approachable even though they sometimes must make difficult decisions with limited communication. Participants valued the importance of their involvement PLCs and recognized that their working with the teachers through the processes provides a more unified front and establishes a rapport with the teachers that demonstrates PLCs are school endeavor that is beneficial to all. When administrators are cognizant of what is occurring in these PLCs, they are better able to support teachers in making greater impacts on student performance.

Further expression of what structures administrators have in place to support sustaining PLCs served to develop understanding for research question two. The sub-themes purposeful meeting, data-driven instruction, and common vision were areas that aided in developing an understanding of structures that administrators have in place to sustain PLCs. Setting a purpose for meeting and clearly allocating time to do so was essential to sustaining PLCs because teachers can see the value in meeting and appreciate the time being built into their day to do so. Data is one of the means administrators acknowledged sets the tone and purpose for meeting, and therefore they understand the significance of data analysis. This focus on purpose and data led into the next area that administrators shared as supplementary to PLCs, which is a common vision. When the administrators and faculty are focused on shared expectations, it aids in the collaborative processes that are in place within the school and among its staff and allows best practices to be at the forefront of their educational goals.

Encouragement, understanding, and trust were sub-themes that addressed research question three on how administrators support an environment conducive to sustaining PLCs. Administrators discussed how they encourage their faculty to try new things and work toward their strengths in effort to build capacity within their schools. Several administrators expressed how their teacher leaders, master teachers, and curriculum coaches work to support the school vision and mission. However, participants also shared the importance of knowing how much their faculty can handle and understanding who will be the best suited for certain tasks. By developing relationships with and working together with their faculty, administrators affirmed that trust is another key component to sustaining PLCs. Developing these supportive structures within the school builds capacity and encourages working toward common collaborative goals that can be achieved through the sustained PLCs.

Challenges to sustaining PLCs were also noted by administrators, which included money and resources, teacher ownership, and differentiation for teachers. As with many programs, if there were more money, there could be more resources. Having the necessary resources to be sustain PLCs was a concern for administrators because some were not able to meet as often or for as long as they would like in PLCs due to reduction in personnel. Other participants shared that it is a problem that some teachers to not take ownership of the PLC process by bringing the correct data or valuing their ability to impact student achievement. The issue of not taking ownership by the teachers makes understanding the concern of differentiation for teachers more understandable. If teachers are meeting but not needing the same assistance, it makes the meeting less valuable for some; thus, some administrators expressed the desire to be able to differentiate their PLC meetings while others shared ways that they have worked to differentiate even though it is still a work in progress.

In the next chapter, a summary of the findings, a discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and literature review, the implications of the study, the delimitation and limitations, and the recommendations for future research will be presented.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore administrators' perceptions of their role in sustaining PLCs in Louisiana schools. In this study, I sought to develop an understanding of K-12 administrators' lived experiences with sustaining PLCs within their schools. Through collection and analysis of data related to participant experiences, I identified themes that told the stories of these 14 administrators' experiences. Focus on the shared and individual experiences of the participants were explored through a survey/questionnaire, individual interviews, documents, focus group interview, and mind maps. Data were analyzed in accordance with the plan outlined in Chapter Three. Detailed analysis of themes and participants' statements were presented in Chapter Four. This chapter includes the following sections: (a) an overview of the chapter, (b) a summary of the findings, (c) a discussion of the findings and the implications considering the relevant literature and theory, (d) an implications section, (e) an outline of the study delimitations and limitations, and (f) recommendations for future research before concluding in a summary.

Summary of Findings

This study was conducted in three Southeast Louisiana in school districts identified as current or former The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) and/or Best Practices Center (BPC) districts. Participants included 14 K-12 school administrators from the three school districts who served at schools where professional learning communities (PLCs) had been in place for at least two years. Administrator experiences were shared through a survey/questionnaire, individual interviews, documents, a focus group, and mind maps. Three major themes emerged from the data and are presented in this chapter to share experiences of the

participants. Major themes included: leadership responsibilities to support sustaining PLCs, best practices, and building capacity.

Research question one guiding the study asked how administrators perceive their role in sustaining PLCs in Louisiana schools. The major theme identified by exploration of question one was leadership responsibilities to support sustaining PLCs. Participants identified themselves as one of three styles of leadership: (1) servant, (2) shared, or (3) student-oriented. Additionally, other sub-themes for leadership responsibilities to support sustaining PLCs were shared, which included: (4) visibility, (5) focus, (6) communication, and (7) involvement. Six administrators identified with servant leadership where they desire to provide everything necessary to support teachers in their endeavor to educate students. Another five administrators noted shared or distributed leadership as their style to encourage everyone to take a team approach to leading the school. Lastly, three participants expressed a student-oriented leadership style that they employ in leading their schools.

In addition to their leadership styles, visibility was another area where participants noted the importance in their role in sustaining PLCs. Their presence encouraged teachers to value the PLC process and understand that the actions set in place within would be monitored. Also, administrator focus was valuable in creating PLC environments that work towards bettering teachers and students within the school settings. Communication of these ideas and process to the faculty was essential to participants because, while not all administrators spoke of having an open-door policy, having an informed staff contributed to better buy-in to the school's vision. Administrators included experiences of being involved with teachers to work collaboratively in the PLC meetings, which supported the continuation of PLCs within their school settings.
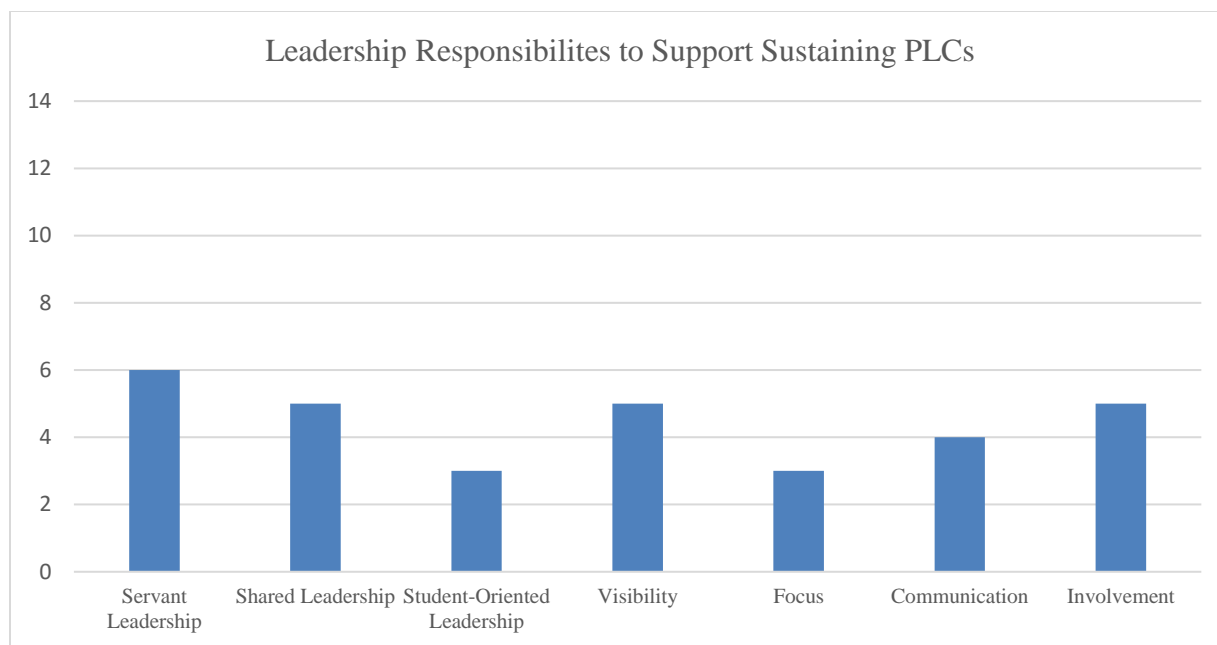
Figure 5. Frequency of values in leadership responsibilities to support sustaining PLCs.

Research question two addressed what structures administrators perceive necessary to sustain PLCs in their respective schools, and the theme of best practices emerged. Purposeful planning was demonstrated to be significant for administrators to have in place to sustain PLCs, because setting the purpose for meeting assisted teachers' desire to be part of these collaborative structures. Likewise, data-driven instruction was another area that was supportive of the PLC process because it allowed the meetings to be goal-focused based on analyzed results of various assessments that were being utilized. This leads to the third sub-theme, common vision, that was deemed beneficial in sustaining PLC. By creating a culture that is supportive of a common vision, goals can be tackled schoolwide, and everyone is working toward their accomplishment.
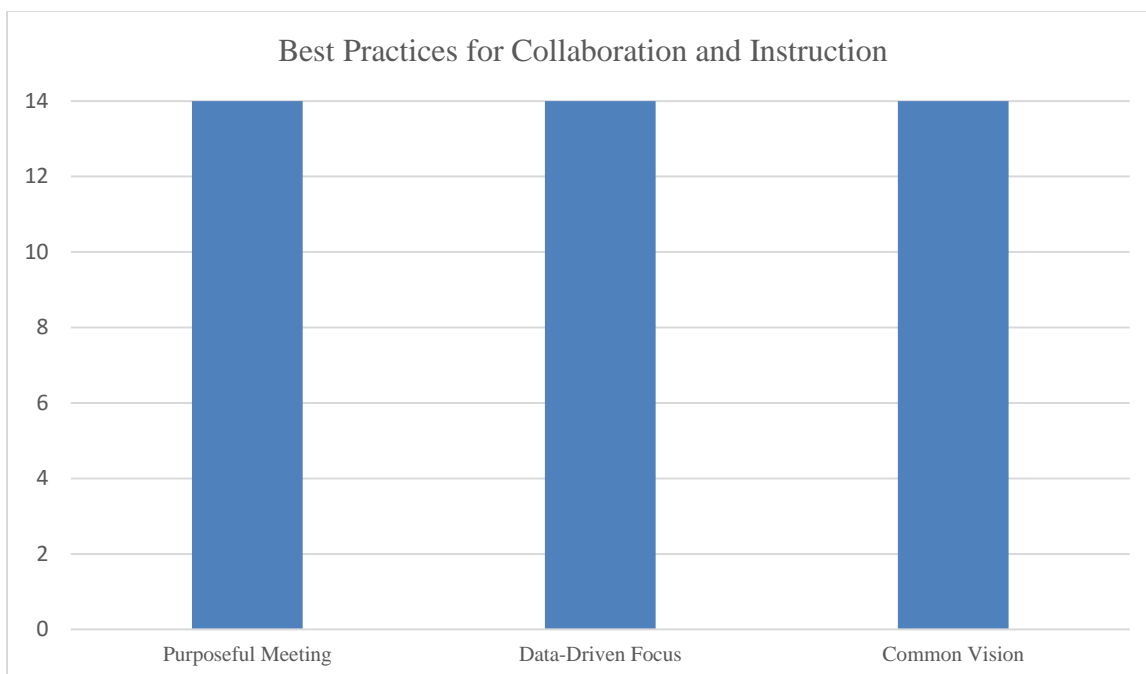
Figure 6. Frequency of values in best practices for collaboration and instruction.

Research question three examined how administrators support an environment conducive to sustaining PLCs, and the theme of building capacity developed. Encouragement for pursuits that teachers desire to try was one area where participants felt they created a supportive environment to sustain PLCs. The need to allow teachers to share their strengths was a benefit for the school and the teachers themselves. However, understanding was also another sub-theme because administrators noted the value of understanding faculty members and realizing their capabilities before asking them to take on greater responsibilities. Trust is also a support necessary to sustain PLCs because administrators need to be able to trust that faculty members will carry through with what needs to be done, and teachers need to trust that administrators believe they can accomplish what is being asked of them.
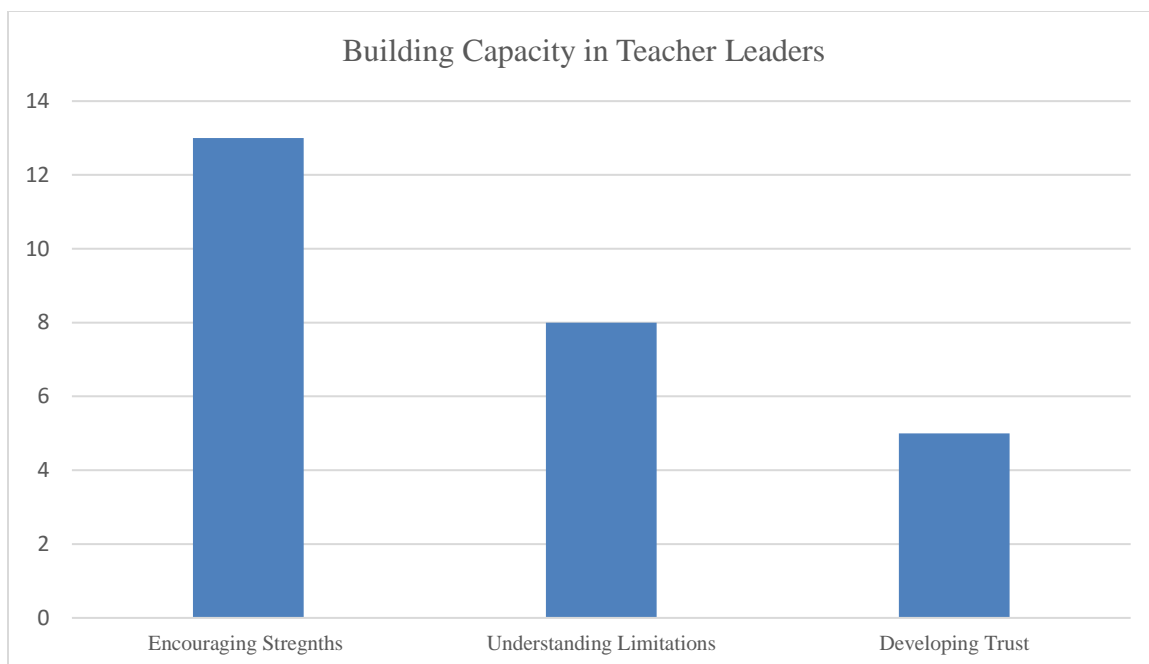
Figure 7. Frequency of values in building capacity in teacher leaders.

Research question four examined what challenges administrators face in sustaining PLCs. Money and resources were noted as one area that can hinder the efficacy of PLCs because funding often denotes the number of personnel accessible to allow teachers to attend PLC meeting during the work day. The lack of money also directly impacts the time allotment for PLCs. One participant noted their PLCs "used to be 90 minutes and we had to limit them to 60 Minutes because I got cut personnel." Also, having the necessary materials to do what is being asked of teachers with curriculum shifts is necessary to maintain the collaborative processes. Some participants noted difficulty with teachers taking ownership of their responsibilities in PLCs regarding data and instructional practices. With the variation in what teachers need, other administrators discussed being able to differentiate PLC meetings based on teacher needs. While some participants expressed moderate success with differentiating PLCs, others still noted it is an area that needs improvement.
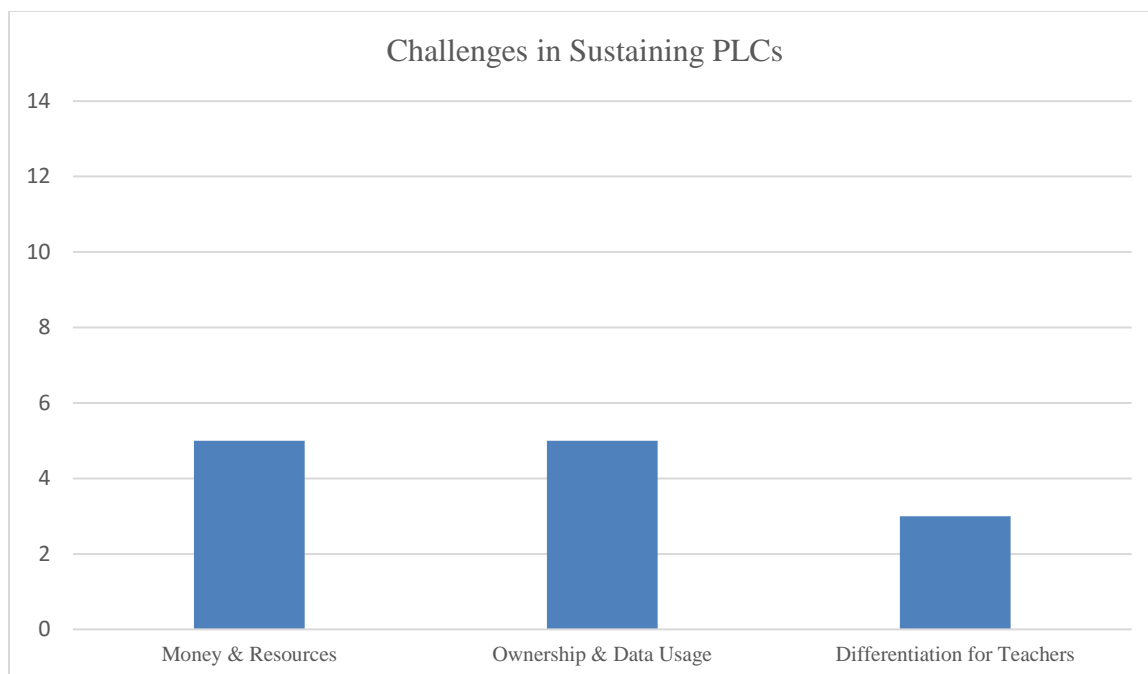
Figure 8. Frequency of values in challenges in sustaining PLCs.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of K-12 administrators with sustaining PLCs. Through this study, I discovered participants value their roles in sustaining PLCs in the school settings and see value in their use to positively impact student and teacher achievement. These findings align with Burns' (1978) transformational leadership theory and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and may assist in further progressing the sustainability of PLCs within K-12 school settings.

Empirical Literature

Research was minimal on administrators experiences with PLCs; however, the impact of PLCs was explored from varying studies presenting teachers perspectives and identifying key elements of successful PLCs. When leaders promote and atmosphere the encourages and empowers teacher, student performance can be positively impacted (Garza, et al., 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Klar, & Brewer, 2014). Participants expressed the collaborative nature of PLCs

allows teachers to more effectively accomplish their responsibilities with a shared approach. Gerald expressed, "We're having success we have with collaboration." Thus, his leadership further encourages the PLC process, which supports the teachers buy-in to the process because of the success they are experiencing. It is also essential that administrators are accessible in PLCs meetings, and "there must be real and continuing investment and engagement by the school administration" (Sims & Penny, 2014, p. 44). Administrators who develop trust with and among their faculty and themselves can create environments focused on common goals and build capacity by tapping into various strengths staff members possess (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Evelyn expressed the importance of building trust before tackling anything else, and Gerald shared that then "you can rely on your teacher leaders" once the trust is established.

Implementation of PLCs and the structures that support them is the responsibility of school administrators (Murphy & Lick, 2005). In addition to putting the structures in place, participants acknowledged their role in creating a positive environment for the school and the importance of being visible. Kathy expressed the benefit of always making time to recognize the teachers and students as she walks around campus, and Hannah shared how her demeanor establishes the tone for the school. Principals must create an environment supportive of collaboration so that teachers feel part of a team instead of being isolated to efficiently impact student achievement (Lunenburg & Irby, 2014). Marion explained how teachers feel less isolated and are more easily implementing changes in curriculum because of the collaboration in PLCs. Involvement in educational structures that build administrators knowledge supports teacher and student improvement (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2013). Evelyn shared how PLCs solidify her knowledge of what is happening with the students on her campus because she is involved in analyzing their work and developing plans to best meet their needs. Understanding

the vast needs of students and teachers, "a PLC should have a broad mission that incorporates

analysis and discussion of the full range of the academic performance of the school, ranging

from the individual student, to the classroom and on to the institution" (Sims & Penny, 2014, p.

45). Working side-by-side with teachers in collaboration meetings to establish and analyze

student needs is also important to Gerald so that he can better understand what is occurring on

his campus and enhance his instructional leadership abilities.

Guidance from coaches or principals may give teachers opportunity to showcase their

leadership abilities and bring strategies to their classroom that they are then willing to share with

their fellow teachers to encourage success for other educators in the school experience success

(Lent & Voigt, 2014). All the participants spoke of the value of teacher leaders, master teachers,

and curriculum coaches; Nancy noted, "I rely 100 percent on my curriculum coaches." Reliance

on support personnel must include the use of meaningful activities that will enhance teacher

knowledge (Salleh, 2016). Participants shared the value of purposeful meeting where teachers

are reflective in practice and make plans to support their development and student learning. This

reflective practice can aid student achievement because teachers are able to assess what is

working and what may need to be done differently to support student performance and then

discuss these ideas with their colleagues (Wasta, 2017).

Effective leadership is an integral component of sustained professional development, and

teachers welcome being recognized and sharing their ideas (Gaikhorst et al., 2017). Participants

remarked on the necessity of making teachers feel valued and appreciated for the work they do

and for being a part of the school family. Marion acknowledged that teachers have chosen to be

in the school where they are employed, and they have been chosen to be there, so having a

relationship that understands the importance of the teachers who do the bulk of the work in

educating children is essential. Principals can more readily engage with staff in small group

settings and better support the teachers' efforts (DuFour & Marzano, 2011); thus, PLCs are

supportive of this small group collaborative environment where teachers work alongside

administrators for common goals. Participants shared the importance of being in the PLCs with

teachers and provided a united front with them for the success of the school. These positive

relationships among and with staff members can promote a school culture that can positively

impact student achievement (Chen et al., 2016). Administrators shared the value of building

trust with and among staff members and trusting environments help create a culture of respect

and collegiality where principals can support everyone's efforts toward the school goals

(Jäppinen et al., 2016; Owen, 2016).

Sustaining PLCs in these school settings was achieved because participants appreciated

the need to build time into the day for teachers to analyze data and develop their instructional

practices. Sufficient time and adequate procedures to complete essential tasks support

sustainment (Hairon & Tan; 2017, Huffman et al., 2016; Jäppinen et al., 2016; Zhang et al.,

2017). Developing a vision for PLCs that teachers have an active role in creating is another way

participant sustain PLCs in their schools. To develop a culture of change, administrators need to

allow sufficient time for PLCs with a clearly-modeled focus on collaboration and be visible and

engaged with the process (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). Again, participants saw themselves

as a tone setter for the school and recognized the importance of their presence and interaction in

PLCs. Support of the administrators is a key component of sustaining PLCs, so teachers may

engage in the varying responsibilities that improve their practice (Brendefur et al., 2014). All

participants shared they are very supportive of the PLC process and of their staff members.

Theoretical Literature

One theoretical framework guiding this study was Burn's (1978) transformational leadership theory. Leadership should be mutually stimulating for the leader and those being led to support the advancement of subordinates becoming leaders (Burns, 1978). None of the participants specifically expressed their leadership style as transformational, yet their stories did support the desire to lift-up their faculty to be the greatest persons they can. Administrators expressed thoughts about how they hoped their faculty believe they "never let them settle for mediocrity as an educator and those high expectations also carried over to their own personal lives so they could be a better person overall," (Gerald) and that "I pushed them to be their best...not just in the classroom but life overall-positive and uplifting" (Hannah). While both Gerald and Hannah identified with servant leadership, these statements demonstrate the transformational qualities of their leadership style. Transformational and servant leadership complement one another because they exemplify "visionaries, generate high levels of trust, serve as role models, show consideration for others, delegate responsibilities, empower followers, teach, communicate, listen, and influence followers" (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004, p. 359), yet servant leaders focus less on organizational objectives and more on the people who follow them.

Distributed leadership was presented by five administrators and the leadership style with which they identified. The premise of transformational leadership is to empower and inspire people to be leaders where "understanding the needs of individual staff members is more important than trying to coordinate and control them;" thus, a distributed leadership approach can be transformational (Spillane, 2006, p. 24). With the noted similarities in distributed and transformational leadership, participants who identified as having a distributed leadership style

may still align with Burns' (1978) transformational leadership. Student-centered learning

challenges the idea that "what is good for the adults is good for the students" (Robinson, 2011, p.

6) but acknowledges the need to have reasonable working conditions with faculty and district

staff personnel. When the focus is on the students, it may seem to wrestle with transformational

leadership, but with other measures in place that were present in this study, working towards a

common focus of what is best for students can support transformational leadership.

Transformational leadership seeks to reach the moral fiber of individuals to spark them to action

to work together for a common purpose (Burns, 1978). Administrators can utilize

transformational leadership to develop a school environment focused on enhancing school and

student performance (Printy et al., 2009). By understanding the various leadership styles the

participants employed and how those styles relate to transformational leadership, leaders can

better comprehend how their leadership can enact change through supportive measures that

empower and inspire their faculty.

Bandura's (1977) social learning theory aligns with the roles administrators shared that they

play in sustaining PLCs because working together and learning from one another is key to the

theory. Administrators shared the importance of creating and common focus and utilizing

collaborative structures to positively impact student achievement. Creating a plan and not

working to enact the plan is counterproductive, so people must be focused on carrying through

with established plans to garner success (Bandura, 2001). Marion shared with certainty that

PLCs have had a great impact on their positive student performance because they have been able

to work together to enact plans that make a meaningful impact on student achievement, and other

participants echoed similar sentiments. Educators who have confidence in their abilities are

more likely to develop plans to better meet students' needs (De Neve et al., 2015). The idea of a

common vision and focus were threaded throughout the participants' comments along with working together supporting shared learning and goal setting. When people think the reason they fail at something is due to not exerting enough effort, they strive to overcome those deficits as opposed to individuals who do not believe themselves to be capable (Bandura, 1977). Kathy shared how the collaborative nature of PLCs helps faculty feel more comfortable with the resources they are using for instruction because all teachers are working on the same work. Gerald noted that teachers are excited about the PLC process and have taken ownership of their responsibilities because they see the process working and they are motivated to continue. Motivation is essential in furnishing a purpose for people to engage in activities (Bandura, 1977). Maintaining this common vision where teachers are motivated to work towards specified goals together and learn from one another is consistent with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory.

Implications

The results of my study examining the lived experiences of K-12 administrators in sustaining PLCs can provide stakeholders such as current and future administrators and district leaders understanding of ways PLCs can be sustained with administrator support. Additionally, district leaders can benefit from this knowledge by making them aware of ways they can support principals in sustaining PLCs within their organizations. Findings of this study demonstrate the value of sustaining PLCs within school organizations. Results show that administrators value creating PLC environments to support collaborative work environments where educators can focus on improving student performance. This knowledge is valuable for current and future administrators who wish to implement similar structures in their school settings.

Theoretical Implications

Transformational leadership encourages those being led to strive to better themselves in their endeavors (Burns, 1978). While they expressed varying leadership styles that support transformational leadership, participants each shared the importance of their leadership style in sustaining PLCs by expressing value in providing teachers needed resources to be successful, sharing leadership roles, and maintaining a student focus for educational goals. Principals must create a positive working environment where teachers feel confronting the challenge of educating students is a team effort and personal and professional growth are valued (Habegger, 2008). Administrators' experiences demonstrated their desire to promote these positive collaboration environments within their schools.

Allowing teachers opportunity to serve in leadership roles supports instructional practices and builds collaborative environments among educator teams (Wang et al., 2017). Participants put their trust in employees who served in varying roles to support teacher leadership. When schools develop a culture that supports collegiality, teachers become more self-assured in their teaching practices; thus they may better meet the needs of their students (De Neve et al., 2015). When working together for a common goal, people are better able to learn and are motivated to achieve set goals (Bandura, 1977). PLCs allow teachers to learn with and from one another based on discussions and goals developed in a collaborative setting (Mintzes et al., 2013). This collaborative nature supported by participants allows for specific focus on goals that can be attained and measures for determining if students are meeting the expectations. Data-driven instruction that is supported and encouraged by the principal can have a positive impact on student achievement (Brown, 2016).

Empirical Implications

The findings imply that district support in the form of funding and resources may assist principals in sustaining PLCs in their school settings. Administrator and educators appreciate working in districts that utilize PLCs since they value collaborative work structures (Woodland, 2016). Superintendents should model the PLC structures in district meetings and work collaboratively for district goals through use of data analysis (Hilliard & Newsome, 2013). Several participants mentioned changes in state and district expectations that impacted the structure of their PLCs and the goal that they set. Establishing clear district goals by the district assists schools in creating their goals to match the district goals and develop plans to enhance teacher and student performance (Farley-Ripple & Buttram, 2014). Principals saw the value in being transparent and communicating information to their teachers. When principals are better informed of expectations, these expectations are likely to be shared with teachers who then utilize the information to impact student achievement (Hindmann et al., 2015).

Practical Implications

Creating a common vision and goals for the school is essential for student success (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010). Participants agreed that PLC structure allows creation of common goals and instruction that positively benefits students. Focus on school performance may be overwhelming because possible consequences attached to negative ratings, but most teachers want teach students to the best of their abilities, so penalties are ineffective in enacting change (DuFour, Dufour, Eaker, & Karhanek 2010). On the contrary, instituting PLCs and creating environments where everyone works for the good of the students collaboratively can garner success (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010, p. 11). Each participant spoke of benefits of PLCs and how they have impacted student performance, even the administrators in

the schools that had minimal success or even slight regression because they saw changes for the better in their students and teachers regardless of the school performance score. Administrators acknowledged that PLCs work to empower teachers and make them focus on their role in educating the students among their team of educators. This empowerment is possible when collaboration is built upon meaningful engagement that promotes knowledge and solidarity (Sompong et al., 2015). All participants supported empowering and developing their teachers to be their best selves in and out of the school setting. Administrators should realize that PLCs promote teacher development, which has the largest impression on student performance (Pont, 2014). The worth of a PLC depends on the leaders and the environment they create and their willingness to implement new ideas and broaden their knowledge (Sparks, 2005).

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations of this study included restricting the study to only 14 administrators in Southeast Louisiana who sustained PLCs in their schools for two or more years. Participants were also purposefully selected from schools that had been or were still a part of The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) and/or Best Practices Center (BPC) where PLC implementation was part of these programs. These school districts were chosen because they were likely to have established PLCs; thus this is a delimitation of the study because no districts without the benefit of this program were explored in this study.

Limitations of the study included the nature of data reporting since, aside from documents from the Louisiana Department of Education, all data were self-reported by the participants. In addition, only six individuals shared documents related to their PLC meetings, only four participants chose to engage in the focus group interview, and only three administrators submitted mind maps. Each of these circumstances further limited the study. Likewise,

garnering participants was difficult at the start of the study, and obtaining permission to contact another school district took three months. Therefore, the timeframe for data collection spanned several months.

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this study support the literature review that demonstrates components that were deemed necessary in successful PLC implementation and continuation. However, with this study limited to the Southeast Louisiana region, conducting this study with administrators from other areas within Louisiana or in another state may be beneficial to see if administrators in other areas have similar experiences. Likewise, participants only included administrators in districts that were currently or previously engaged in a program that assisted their districts with PLC implementation and continuation. Therefore, exploring districts where these types of programs that implement PLCs have not been utilized may share varied experiences. Additionally, self-reported data without the guise of anonymity of the participant to the interviewee may discourage completely honest communication. Providing some type of anonymous survey or questionnaire to which participants respond may provide varied data results. Consequently, to further develop a larger scale perspective of how principals sustain PLCs, a quantitative study that addresses some of the key components noted in this study may give a broader picture of ways administrators sustain PLCs in their schools. Permission was obtained to utilize the PLCA-R for descriptive statistics only. Yet, if permission were given to use the instrument anonymously on a larger scale, a candid picture of a larger number of administrators' perceptions may be presented. Also, this study was limited to principals' roles in sustaining PLCs, but all of the participants spoke to the value of their teacher leaders, assistant principals, and curriculum

personnel. Further exploration of these individuals' roles in sustaining PLCs may provide

insight into additional ways principals support personnel that assist in sustaining PLCs.

Summary

Administrators see the immense benefit in PLCs according to the findings of this study.

Principals need to delve into instructional practices and lead teachers to implement best practices

within their classrooms while encouraging teacher empowerment (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

The collaborative nature of PLCs supports a student-focused environment that allows educators

to better themselves and their students. Teachers and administrators must willingly participate

together in collaboration to "ensure parity in goals, responsibility, accountability and resources"

(Carpenter, 2015, p. 690). To sustain these structures in their schools, administrators work to

create a respectful culture where teachers work together to better their craft. Decisions are based

on data and modifications that will best suit the common goals of all stakeholders. Empowering

teachers to take the lead within PLCs and in other aspects of the school was deemed important to

administrators to build capacity within their school settings. Teacher leadership plays a

significant role in developing positive collaboration and relationships that support reciprocal

learning among teachers and leaders and transference of best practices and teacher development

(Hairon et al., 2015). Administrators did note some challenges regarding money and resources

as well as teachers taking ownership and having varying needs. Inadequate allotment of time in

PLCs to accomplish necessary tasks can negatively impact PLC success (Sims & Penny, 2014;

Zhang et al., 2017). Likewise, lack of resources and teacher professionalism in regard to PLCs

were shown to impede PLC sustainability (Zhang et al., 2017). Nonetheless, all participants saw

the benefit to continue with PLC sustainability in their schools. When administrators encourage

a school culture that allots necessary time to PLCs, provide clear expectations for collaboration,

develop an environment of shared practice, utilize data to impact instructional practice, employ

personnel that assist in leadership roles, work alongside teachers, and monitor expectations, they

can create a school environment in which PLCs are sustainable (Buttram & Farley-Ripple,

2016).

REFERENCES

Abrego, C., & Pankake, A. (2011). The district-wide sustainability of a professional learning community during leadership changes at the superintendency level. *Administrative Issues Journal: Education, Practice and Research, 1*(1), 3-13.

Ackoff, R. L., & Greenburg, D. (2008). *Turning learning right side up: Putting education back on track.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Arthur, S., & Nazroo, J. (2003). Designing fieldwork strategies and materials. In J. Ritchie & J. Lewis (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers. SAGE: Los Angeles, CA.* (pp. 109-137).

Baker-Doyle, K. J. (2015). No teacher is an island: How social networks shape teacher quality, In G. K LeTendre & A. W. Wiseman (Eds.), *Promoting and sustaining a quality teacher workforce: International perspectives on education and society.* Published online: 27 Oct 2015; (pp. 367-383). doi: 10.1108/S1479-367920140000027005

Bailey, C. A. (2007). Coding, memoing, and descriptions. In *A guide to qualitative field research* (pp. 125-141). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Ltd. doi: 10.4135/9781412983204.n9

Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Bandura, A. (1995). *Self-efficacy in Changing Societies*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York, NY: W. H. Freeman and Company.

Bandura, A. (1988). Self-regulation of motivation and action through goal systems. In V.

 Hamilton, G. H. Bower, & N. H. Frijda (Eds.), *Cognitive perspectives on emotion and*

 motivation (pp. 37-61). Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Bandura, A. (2001). Social cognitive theory: An agentic perspective. *Annual Review of*

 Psychology, 1.

Bennett, J.V., Ylimaki, R.M., Dugan, T.M. and Brunderman, L.A. (2013). Developing the

 potential for sustainable improvement in underperforming schools: Capacity building in

 the socio-cultural dimension. *Journal of Educational Change, 15*(4), 377-409. doi:

 10.1007/s10833-013-9217-6.

Bergmark, U., Salopek, M., Kawai, R., & Lane-Myler, J. (2014). Facilitating democracy in a

 testing culture: Challenges and opportunities for school leaders. *Journal of Cases in*

 Educational Leadership, 17(1), 32-44. doi: 10.1177/ 1555458913518539

Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research*

 Journal, *9*(2), 27-40.

Brendefur, J. L., Whitney, B., Stewart, R. A., Pfiester, J., & Zarbinisky, J. (2014). Instructional

 learning teams: A case study. *Journal of Curriculum and Teaching, 3*(1), 36-46.

Brown III, G. (2016). Leadership's influence: A case study of an elementary principal's indirect

 impact on student achievement. *Education*, *137*(1), 101-115.

Buttram, J. L., & Farley-Ripple, E. N. (2016). The role of principals in professional learning

 communities. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 15*(2), 192-220. doi: 10.1080/

 15700763.2015.1039136

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership* [Kindle version]. New York: Harper & Row. Open Road Media.

Buzan, T. (1991). Mind mapping. *Executive Excellence, 8*(8), 3-4.

Carpenter, D. (2015). School culture and leadership of professional learning communities. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *29*(5), 682-694. doi: 10.1108/IJEM-04-2014-0046

Charner-Laird M., Ippolito, J., & Dobbs, C. L. (2016). The roles of teacher leaders in guiding PLCs focused on disciplinary literacy. *Journal of School Leadership*, *26*(6), 975-1001.

Chen, P., Lee, C., Lin, H., & Zhang, C. (2016). Factors that develop effective professional learning communities in Taiwan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 248-265. doi:10.1080/02188791.2016.1148853

Chen, Y., & Mitchell, C. (2015). Interactions between professional learning communities and the educational culture where they are employed: Comparative research across Beijing and Ontario schools. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, *43*(2), 39-52.

Cherkowski, S. (2016). Exploring the role of the school principal in cultivating a professional learning climate. *Journal of School Leadership*, *26*(3), 523-543.

Christ, T., Arya, P., & Chiu, M. M. (2017). Relations among resources in professional learning communities and learning outcomes. *Teaching Education*, *28*(1), 94-114. doi:10.1080/10476210.2016.1212826

Corkery, J., Hall, K., Jeffries, J. Laskowski, K., Romig, G., Tranell, J., Peters, B., & Whitney, A. E. (2015). Shared vulnerability in professional learning: Growing instructional coaches in a culture of PDS partnership. *School-University Partnerships: The Journal of the National Association of Professional Development Schools, 8*(2), 72-78.

Creswell, J. W. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.) [Kindle edition]. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc.

De Neve, D., Devos, G., & Tuytens, M. (2015). The importance of job resources and self-efficacy for beginning teachers' professional learning in differentiated instruction. *Teaching & Teacher Education, 47*, 30-41.

Dillard, H. K. (2016). Pre-service training in professional learning communities benefits novice teacher. *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal*, *9*(2), 1-13.

Dogan, S., Pringle, R., & Mesa, J. (2016). The impacts of professional learning communities on science teachers' knowledge, practice and student learning: A review. *Professional Development in Education*, *42*(4), 569-588. doi:10.1080/19415257.2015.1065899

DuFour, R. (2014). Harnessing the power of PLCs. *Educational Leadership*, *71*(8), 30-35.

DuFour, R., Eaker, R. E., DuFour, R. B., & DuFour, R. (2008). *Revisiting professional learning communities at work: New insights for improving schools*. Bloomington: Solution Tree.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Karhanek, G. (2010). *Raising the bar and closing the gap: Whatever it takes.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2010). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work* (2nd ed.). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

DuFour, R., & Marzano, R. (2011). *Leaders of learning: How district, school, and classroom leaders improve student achievement*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

DuFour, R., & Reeves, D. (2016). The futility of PLC lite. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *97*(6), 69-71. doi:10.1177/0031721716636878

Eaker, R., DuFour, R., & DuFour, R. (2002). *Getting started: Reculturing schools to become professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Edwards, F. (2012). Learning communities for curriculum change: Key factors in an educational change process in New Zealand. *Professional Development in Education, 38*(1), 25-47. doi: 10.1080/19415257.2011.592077

Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 114 Stat. 1177 (2015-2016).

Farley-Ripple, E. N., & Buttram, J. (2013). Harnessing the power of teacher networks. *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 95(3), 12-15.

Farley-Ripple, E. N., & Buttram, J. L. (2014). Developing collaborative data use through professional learning communities: Early lessons from Delaware. *Studies in Educational Evaluation, 42*, 41-53. doi:10.1016/j.stueduc.2013.09.006

Farris-Berg, K. (2014). A different model for school success: Empower teachers. *Phi Delta Kappan, 95*(7), 31-36. doi:10.1177/003172171409500707

Feldman, J. (2016). Pedagogical habitus engagement: Teacher learning and adaptation in a professional learning community. *Educational Research for Social Change, 5*(2), 65-80. doi:10.17159/2221-4070/2016/v5i2a5

Frost, D. (2012). From professional development to system change: Teacher leadership and innovation. *Professional Development in Education*, *38*(2), 205-227. doi:10.1080/ 19415257.2012.657861

Gaikhorst, L., Beishuizen, J. J.J. Zijlstra B. J.H. & Volman, M. L.L. (2016) The sustainability of a teacher professional development programme for beginning urban teachers, *Cambridge Journal of Education, 47*(1), 135-154, DOI: 10.1080/0305764X.2015.1125449

Garza, E., Drysdale, L., Gurr, D., Jacobson, S. L., & Merchant, B. (2014). Leadership for school success: Lessons from effective principals. *International Journal of Educational Management, 28*(7), 798-811. doi:10.1108/IJEM-08-2013-0125

Gray, J., Kruse, S., & Tarter, C. J. (2015). Enabling school structures, collegial trust and

academic emphasis: Antecedents of professional learning communities. *Educational*

Management Administration & Leadership, 1-17. doi: 10.1741143215574505.

Habegger, S. (2008). The principal's role in successful schools: Creating a positive school

culture. *Principal*, *88*(1), 42-46.

Hairon, S., Goh, J. W. P., & Chua, C. S. K. (2015). Teacher leadership enactment in professional

learning community contexts: Towards a better understanding of the phenomenon.

School Leadership & Management, 35(2), 163-182. doi:10.1080/13632434.2014.992776

Hairon, S., & Tan, C. (2017). Professional learning communities in Singapore and Shanghai:

Implications for teacher collaboration. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative &*

International Education, *47*(1), 91-104. doi:10.1080/03057925.2016.1153408

Hilliard, A. T., & Newsome Jr, E. (2013). Effective communication and creating professional

learning communities is a valuable practice for superintendents. *Contemporary Issues in*

Education Research, 6(4), 353-363.

Hindman, J., Rozzelle, J., Ball, R., & Fahey, J.,(2015). Visible leading: principal academy

connects and empowers principals. *Journal of Staff Development*, *36*(4), 18-22.

Hitt, D. H., & Tucker, P. D. (2016). Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence

student achievement: A unified framework. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(2), 531-

569.

Hord, S. M. (1996). *School professional staff as learning community questionnaire*. Austin, TX:

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Huffman, J. B., Olivier, D. F., Wang, T., Chen, P., Hairon, S., & Pang, N. (2016). Global

conceptualization of the professional learning community process: transitioning from

country perspectives to international commonalities. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, *19*(3), 327-351. doi:10.1080/13603124.2015.1020343

Jäppinen, A., Leclerc, M., & Tubin, D. (2016). Collaborativeness as the core of professional learning communities beyond culture and context: evidence from Canada, Finland, and Israel. *School Effectiveness & School Improvement*, *27*(3), 315-332. doi:10.1080/09243453.2015.1067235

Kennedy, M. M. (2016a). How does professional development improve teaching? *Review of Educational Research*, 1-36. doi*: 10.3102/0034654315626800*

Kennedy, M. M. (2016b). Parsing the practice of teaching. *Journal of Teacher Education, 67*, 6-17. doi:10.1177/0022487115614617

Klar, H. W., & Brewer, C. A. (2014). Successful leadership in a rural, high-poverty school: The case of County Line Middle School. *Journal of Educational Administration, 52*(4), 422-445. doi: 10.1108/JEA-04-2013-0056

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2012). *The leadership challenge: How to make extraordinary things happen in organizations.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Lalor, B., & Abawi, L. (2014). Professional learning communities enhancing teacher experiences in international schools. *International Journal of Pedagogies & Learning*, *9*(1), 76-86. doi:10.5172/ijpl.2014.9.1.76

Lavié, J. M. (2006). Academic discourses on school-based teacher collaboration: Revisiting the arguments. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 42*(5), 773-805. doi:10.1177/ 0013161X06290647

Lee, M., & Kim, J. (2016). The emerging landscape of school-based professional learning communities in South Korean schools. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 266-284. doi:10.1080/02188791.2016.1148854

Lent, R. C., & Voigt, M. M. (2014). Growing leaders from within: School forms a tight-knit learning community to tackle literacy. *Journal of Staff Development, 35*(1), 32-36.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.

Lomos, C., Hofman, R. H., & Bosker, R. J. (2011). Professional communities and student achievement: A meta-analysis. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 22*(2), 121-148. doi:10.1080/09243453.2010.550467

Louisiana Department of Education. (n.d.a). Building an understanding of the TAP system: Frequently asked questions (FAQs). Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/tap

Louisiana Department of Education. (n.d.b). Louisiana TAP: Building and supporting a system of teachers and leaders. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/tap

Louisiana Department of Education. (n.d.c.). Welcome, Louisiana families and educators. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/about-us

Louisiana Department of Education. (1999-2017). Performance scores. Retrieved from http://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/performance-scores

Louisiana Department of Education. (2013-2016). Performance scores. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/performance-scores

Louisiana Department of Education. (1997-2017). School and district report cards. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/data/reportcards/

Louisiana Department of Education. (2014). 2014-2015 TAP schools in Louisiana. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/library/tap

Louisiana Department of Education. (2015). 2015-2016 TAP and TAP Best Practice (BPC) Schools in Louisiana. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/resources/ library/tap

Louisiana Department of Education. (2016). 2016-2017 TAP and TAP Best Practice (BPC) schools in Louisiana. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/ resources/library/tap

Louisiana Department of Education. (2017a). Louisiana principal fellowship program guide 2017-2018. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/ resources/library/tap

Louisiana Department of Education (2017b). TAP System and NIET Best Practices Program Guide 2017-2018. Retrieved from https://www.louisianabelieves.com/ resources/library/tap

Lowrie, T. (2014) An educational practices framework: The potential for empowerment of the teaching profession, *Journal of Education for Teaching*, *40*(1), 34-46. doi:10.1080/02607476.2013.864016

Lunenburg, F. C., & Irby, B. J. (2014). Strengthening the principal's toolbox: Strategies to boost learning. *National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal*, *32*(1), 4-17.

Menges, J. I., Walter, F., Vogel, B., & Bruch, H. (2011). Transformational leadership climate: Performance linkages, mechanisms, and boundary conditions at the organizational level. *The Leadership Quarterly, 22*(5), 893-909. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2011.07.010

Mintzes, J., Marcum, B., Messerschmidt-Yates, C., & Mark, A. (2013). Enhancing self-efficacy in elementary science teaching with professional learning communities. *Journal of Science Teacher Education*, *24*(7), 1201-1218. doi:10.1007/s10972-012-9320-1

Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Qualitative research methods: Focus groups as qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA; SAGE Publications Ltd. doi: 10.4135/9781412984287

Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Mundschenk, N. A., & Fuchs, W. W. (2016). Professional learning communities: An effective mechanism for the successful implementation and sustainability of response to intervention. *SRATE Journal*, *25*(2), 55-64.

Murphy, C. U., & Lick, D. W. (2005). *Whole-faculty study groups: Creating professional learning communities that target student learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *An overview of NAEP*. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). *NAEP assessments: National, state, TUDA, and long-term trend: State profiles*. Washington, D.C.: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards*. Washington, DC: Authors.

National Institute for Excellence in Teaching. (n.d.). Retrieved from http://www.niet.org/

Ning, H. K., Lee, D., & Lee, W. O. (2016). The relationship between teacher value orientations and engagement in professional learning communities. *Teachers & Teaching*, *22*(2), 235-254. doi:10.1080/13540602.2015.1055447

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2002).

Olivier, D. F. (2009). Assessing schools as professional learning communities: Symposium introduction: Professional learning communities assessment-revised. Lafayette: LA.

Olivier, D. F., & Hipp, K. K. (2010). Assessing and analyzing schools as professional learning communities. In K. K. Hipp & J. B. Huffman (Eds.), *Demystifying professional learning communities: School leadership at its best*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2003). Professional learning community assessment. In J. B. Huffman & K. K. Hipp (Eds.), *Reculturing schools as professional learning communities*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press.

Olivier, D. F., & Huffman, J. B. (2016). Professional learning community process in the United States: Conceptualization of the process and district support for schools. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 301-317. doi:10.1080/02188791.2016.1148856

Owen, S. (2014). Teacher professional learning communities: Going beyond contrived collegiality toward challenging debate and collegial learning and professional growth. *Australian Journal of Adult Learning, 54*(2), 54-77.

Owen, S. M. (2015). Teacher professional learning communities in innovative contexts: 'Ah hah moments', 'passion' and 'making a difference' for student learning. *Professional Development in Education, 41*(1), 57-74. doi:10.1080/19415257.2013.869504

Owen, S. (2016). Professional learning communities: Building skills, reinvigorating the passion, and nurturing teacher wellbeing and "flourishing" within significantly innovative schooling contexts. *Educational Review*, *68*(4), 403-419.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Peppers, G. J. (2015). Teachers' perceptions and implementation of professional learning

    communities in a large suburban high school. *National Teacher Education Journal*, *8*(1),

    25-31.

Pont, B. (2014). School leadership: From practice to policy. *Journal of Educational Leadership*

    and Management, *2*(1), 4-28. doi: 10.4471/ijelm.2014.07

Popp, J. S., & Goldman, S. R. (2016). Knowledge building in teacher professional learning

    communities: Focus of meeting matters. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, *59,* 347-359.

    doi:10.1016/j.tate.2016.06.007

Printy, S. M., Marks, H. M., & Bowers, A. J. (2009). Integrated leadership: How principals and

    teachers share transformational and instructional influence. *Journal of School*

    Leadership, 19(5), 504-532.

Robinson, V. (2011). *Student-Centered Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass: A Wiley

    Imprint.

Salleh, H. (2016). Facilitation for professional learning community conversations in

    Singapore. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 285-300.

    doi:10.1080/02188791.2016.1148855

Scott, A., Clarkson, P., & McDonough, A. (2011). Fostering professional learning communities

    beyond school boundaries. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 36*(6), 63-80.

Sims, R.L., & Penny, G.R. (2014). Examination of a failed professional learning community.

    Journal of Education and Training Studies, 3(1), 39-45.

Sjoer, E., & Meirink, J. (2016). Understanding the complexity of teacher interaction in a teacher professional learning community. *European Journal of Teacher Education, 39*(1), 110-125. doi: 10.1080/02619768.2014.994058

Sompong, S., Erawan, P., & Dharm-tad-sa-na-non, S. (2015). The development of professional learning community in primary schools. *Educational Research and Reviews, 10*(21), 2789-2796.

Song, H. (2012). The role of teachers' professional learning communities in the context of curriculum reform in high schools. *Chinese Education & Society, 45*(4), 81-95. doi: 10.2753/CED1061-1932450406

Sparks, D. (2005). Leading for transformation in teaching, learning, and relationships. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker, & R. DuFour (Eds.) *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities* (pp. 155-175). Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Spencer, E. J. (2016). Professional learning communities: Keeping the focus on instructional practice. *Kappa Delta Pi Record*, *52*(2), 83-85. doi:10.1080/00228958.2016.1156544

Spillane, J. P. (2006). *Distributed leadership.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass: A Wiley Imprint.

Stone, A.G., Russell, R.F., Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: A difference in leader focus. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal, 25*(4), 349-361.

Sun-Keung Pang, N., Wang, T., & Lai-Mei Leung, Z. (2016). Educational reforms and the practices of professional learning community in Hong Kong primary schools. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 231-247. doi:10.1080/02188791.2016.1148852

Svanbjörnsdóttir, B. M., Macdonald, A., & Frímannsson, G. H. (2016). Views of learning and a sense of community among students, paraprofessionals and parents in developing a

school culture towards a professional learning community. *Professional Development in Education, 42*(4), 589-609.

Tam, A. C. F. (2015). Exploring teachers' beliefs about teacher learning in professional learning communities and their influence on collegial activities in two departments. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, *45*(3), 422-444. doi:10.1080/03057925.2013.872025

Tan, Y. M., & Caleon, I. S. (2016). Problem finding in professional learning communities: A learning study approach. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *60*(2), 127-146.

Teachlouisiana.net (n.d.). Verify a teaching certificate. Retrieved from http://www. teachlouisiana.net/

Thacker, E. S. (2017). "PD is where teachers are learning!" High school social studies teachers' formal and informal professional learning. *Journal of Social Studies Research*, *41*(1), 37-52. doi:10.1016/j.jssr.2015.10.001

Thessin, R. A. (2015). Learning from on urban school district: Planning to provide essential supports for teachers' work in professional learning communities. *Educational Planning*, *22*(1), 15-27.

Tschannen-Moran, M., & Gareis, C. R. (2015). Faculty trust in the principal: An essential ingredient in high-performing schools. *Journal of Educational Administration, 53*(1), 66-92.

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.a). Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Retrieved from https://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.b). Improving basic programs operated by local educational agencies (Title I, Part A). Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/ index.html

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.c). Programs: Part A—Title I — Improving the academic achievement of the disadvantaged. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/ esea02/ pg1.html

Vanblaere, B., & Devos, G. (2016). Relating school leadership to perceived professional learning community characteristics: A multilevel analysis. *Teaching & Teacher Education*, *57,* 26-38. doi:10.1016/j.tate.2016.03.003

Visone, J. D. (2016). A learning community of colleagues enhancing practice. *Kappa Delta Pi Record, 52*(2), 66-70.

Wang, D., Wang, J., Li, H., & Li, L. (2017). School context and instructional capacity: A comparative study of professional learning communities in rural and urban schools in China. *International Journal of Educational Development*, *52,* 1-9. doi:10.1016/j.ijedudev.2016.10.009

Wang, T. (2016). School leadership and professional learning community: Case study of two senior high schools in Northeast China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, *36*(2), 202-216. doi:10.1080/02188791.2016.1148849

Wasta, M. J. (2017). PLCs on steroids: Moving teacher practice to the center of data teams. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *98*(5), 67-71.

Wennergren, A., & Blossing, U. (2017). Teachers and students together in a professional learning community. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, *61*(1), 47-59. doi:10.1080/00313831.2015.1066441

Wilson, A. (2016). From professional practice to practical leader: Teacher leadership in professional learning communities. *International Journal of Teacher Leadership*, *7*(2), 45-62.

Woodland, R. H. (2016). Evaluating PK-12 professional learning communities. *American Journal of Evaluation*, *37*(4), 505-521. doi:10.1177/1098214016634203

Yang, Y. (2014). Principals' transformational leadership in school improvement. *International Journal of Educational Management, 28*(3), 279-288. doi:10.1108/IJEM-04-2013-0063

Zhang, J., & Pang, N. (2016). Exploring the characteristics of professional learning communities in China: A mixed-method study. *Asia-Pacific Education Researcher (Springer Science & Business Media B.V.)*, *25*(1), 11-21. doi:10.1007/s40299-015-0228-3

Zhang, J., Yuan, R., & Yu, S. (2017). What impedes the development of professional learning communities in China? Perceptions from leaders and frontline teachers in three schools in Shanghai. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *45*(2), 219-237. doi:10.1177/1741143215617945

APPENDIX A: IRB Letter of Approval

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

September 13, 2017

Brandy Huguet
IRB Approval 2952.091317: Mind Map and Focus Group Consent Form a Phenomenological Study of K-12 School Campus Administrators' Experiences Sustaining Professional Learning Communities

Dear Brandy Huguet,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year, or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

LIBERTY
UNIVERSITY.

Liberty University | Training Champions for Christ since 1971

APPENDIX B: Request Letter & Permission to Use PLCA-R

Dianne F. Olivier, Ph. D.
Coordinator of the Ed.D. Program; Professor
Office: Picard Center, Room 255
Office Telephone Number: (337) 482-5264
Email Address: dolivier@louisiana.edu

University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Educational Foundations and Leadership
200 E. Devalcourt St.,
Lafayette, LA 70506
(337) 482-6680

Dear Dr. Olivier,

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University in the School of Education conducting research as a partial requirement for earning a Doctorate of Education. My research topic is A Phenomenological Study of K-12 School Campus Administrators' Experiences Sustaining Professional Learning Communities. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand administrators' perceptions of their experiences sustaining PLCs.

I am writing to request your permission to use the Professional Learning Communities Assessment – Revised (PLCA-R) for descriptive data collection in my study. I also request to modify the assessment where questions specifically geared to collect data on the school principal will be utilized as a self-assessment for the administrators participating in the survey. The survey will be used as an initial data measure to assesses principals' perceptions about their roles stakeholders in professional learning communities (PLCs) and their school as a whole.

Thank you for your consideration of my request to use the PLCA-R. Please respond by email to bhuguet@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Brandy C. Sirchia Huguet
Doctoral Candidate

UNIVERSITY OF
LOUISIANA
L a f a y e t t e

***Department of Educational Foundations
and Leadership***
P.O. Box 43091
Lafayette, LA 70504-3091

August 30, 2017

Brandy Huguet
22168 Cross Lane
Loranger, LA 70446

Dear Ms. Huguet:

This correspondence is to grant permission for the utilization of the *Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised* (PLCA-R) for your doctoral dissertation research through Liberty University, School of Education. I am pleased you are interested in using the PLCA-R measure to *examine administrators' perceptions of experiences related to sustaining professional learning communities.* This study's findings will contribute to the PLC literature related to sustainability of the PLC process.

This permission letter allows use of the PLCA-R through paper/pencil administration, as well as permission for online administration.

While this letter provides permission to use the measure in your study, authorship of the measure will remain as Olivier, Hipp, and Huffman (exact citation on the following page). This permission does not allow renaming the measure or claiming authorship.

Thank you for your interest in our research and measure for assessing professional learning community attributes within schools. Should you require any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Dianne F. Olivier, Ph. D.
Professor and Coordinator of the Doctoral Program
Joan D. and Alexander S. Haig/BORSF Professor
Department of Educational Foundations and Leadership
College of Education
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
P.O. Box 43091
Lafayette, LA 70504-3091
(337) 482-6408 (Office)   dolivier@louisiana.edu

Reference Citation for Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised measure:

Source: Olivier, D. F., Hipp, K. K., & Huffman, J. B. (2010). Assessing and analyzing
schools. In K. K. Hipp & J. B. Huffman (Eds.). *Demystifying professional
learning communities: School leadership at its Best.* Lanham, MD: Rowman &
Littlefield.

RE: Permission to Reproduce PLCA-R

Dianne L Olivier <dolivier@louisiana.edu>

Tue 4/10/2018 9:51 AM

To:Huguet, Brandy <bhuguet@liberty.edu>;

Brandy,

Congratulations on the completion of your degree.

Yes, you may include the survey in the appendix of your dissertation with the appropriate citation. When permission was provided, the 2nd page of the permission letter included the correct citation. Let me know if you have that information available or if you need for me to resend.

Dianne Olivier

_____

Dianne F. Olivier, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate Council 2017-2018
Professor & Coordinator of the Ed.D. Program
Joan D. & Alexander S. Haig/BORSF Endowed
Professor in Education
Educational Foundations and Leadership
College of Education
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Cecil Picard Center, Room 252
P.O. Box 43091
Office: 337-482-6408
Fax: 337-482-5262
Cell: 337-303-0451
-----Original Message-----
From: Huguet, Brandy <bhuguet@liberty.edu>
Sent: Tuesday, April 10, 2018 9:04 AM
To: dolivier@louisiana.edu
Subject: Permission to Reproduce PLCA-R

Dr. Olivier,
I have completed my doctoral research and defended my dissertation. You granted permission for me to use the PLCA-R for descriptive statistics in my study. I am requesting permission to reproduce the instrument as an appendix in my dissertation with proper citation. Your assistance will be greatly appreciated.
Sincerely,
Dr. Brandy Huguet

APPENDIX C: Request Letter to Contact Administrators

Dear:

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University in the School of Education conducting research as a partial requirement for earning a Doctorate of Education. My research topic is *A Phenomenological Study of K-12 School Campus Administrators' Experiences Sustaining Professional Learning Communities*. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand administrators' perceptions of their experiences sustaining PLCs.

I am writing to request your permission to contact school administrators in your district who are currently leaders of The System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) or Best Practices Center (BPC) schools.

All participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire on professional learning communities (PLCs) for descriptive data purposes. Participants will be asked to participate in an interview or focus group. Interview participants will also be asked to provide professional learning community (PLC)/cluster meetings agendas and notes without identifying teacher or student information for data analysis. Focus group participants will also be asked to create a Mind Map, visual representation, of their experience with PLCs/cluster meetings.

Informed consent information will be provided to each participant prior to participation. Participation is voluntary, and participant consent may be revoked at any time during the study.

Thank you for your consideration of my request to contact administrators within your school district. Please respond by email to bhuguet@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Brandy C. Sirchia Huguet
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D: Participant Recruitment Letter

Dear:

I am a doctoral candidate at Liberty University in the School of Education conducting research as a partial requirement for earning a Doctorate of Education. My research topic is *A Phenomenological Study of K-12 School Campus Administrators' Experiences Sustaining Professional Learning Communities*. The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand administrators' perceptions of their experiences sustaining PLCs.

I am because you are currently a principal of a System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) or Best Practices Center (BPC) schools.

I am asking if you are willing to
- Complete a questionnaire on professional learning communities (PLCs)/cluster meetings for descriptive data purposes, which should take approximately 15-20 minutes.
- Participate in a 45-60-minute face-to-face or virtual, audio-recorded interview about your role in sustaining PLC/cluster meeting.
- If selected for the interview participant group, PLC/cluster meeting agendas and notes without identifying teacher or student information for data analysis.
- Participate in a virtual 30-minute synchronous focus group about your role in sustaining PLC/cluster meeting and provide asynchronous follow-up comments and/or feedback at least once during the two-week period following the synchronous focus group.
- If selected for focus group participation, create a Mind Map, visual representation, of your experience with PLCs/cluster meetings.
- Review transcription of interviews and focus group document to verify, clarify, or modify any of the content.

Informed consent information will be provided to you prior to participation. Participation is voluntary, and you may revoke consent at any time during the study. All identifying information you provide will be confidentially maintained.

Thank you for your consideration of my request to participate in this study. If you choose to participate in this study, additional information regarding the study and a consent form will be provided to you. Please respond by email to bhuguet@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,

Brandy C. Sirchia Huguet
Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX E: Questionnaire and Interview Consent Form

QUESTIONAIRE AND INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF K-12 SCHOOL CAMPUS ADMINISTRATORS'
EXPERIENCES SUSTAINING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES
Brandy C. Sirchia Huguet
Liberty University
School of Education

You are being asked to take part in a research study on administrators perceived roles in sustaining professional learning communities (PLCs)/cluster meetings. You are being asked to participate in the study because your school has been identified as a System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) or Best Practices Center (BPC) school. Carefully read the form and pose any questions you have.

Brandy C. Sirchia Huguet, a Liberty University doctoral candidate in the School of Education, is conducting this study.

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand administrators' perceptions of their experiences sustaining PLCs.

Participation expectations:

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire about PLCs/cluster meetings and to participate in a 45-60-minute face-to-face or virtual, audio-recorded interview about your role in sustaining PLCs/cluster meetings. PLC/cluster meeting agendas and meeting records without identifying student or teacher information will be requested and analyzed.

Risks and benefits:

I anticipate no greater risk than any normal daily activity. The benefit gained will be an understanding administrators' perceptions of their experiences sustaining PLCs.

Compensation:

You will not be compensated for your participation in the study.

Confidentiality:

Your responses to the interview and documents will be kept confidential. The results of the study will be reported without identifying you. The recorded interview will be kept in a locked file cabinet to which only the researcher has a key. All digital records will be stored with password protection.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in the study is not obligatory. Interview questions you prefer not to answer may be skipped. Failure to participate in this study will not affect you in any way.

Questions:

If you have any questions please contact me, Brandy Huguet, at (). My e-mail address is bhuguet@liberty.edu.

A copy of this form will be provided for your records.

By signing below, I agree to participate in the study AND consent to having the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Print name: _____

APPENDIX F: Mind Map and Focus Group Interview Consent Form

MIND MAP AND FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF K-12 SCHOOL CAMPUS ADMINISTRATORS'
EXPERIENCES SUSTAINING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES
Brandy C. Sirchia Huguet
Liberty University
School of Education

You are being asked to take part in a research study on administrators perceived roles in sustaining professional learning communities (PLCs)/cluster meetings. You are being asked to participate in the study because your school has been identified as a System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP) or Best Practices Center (BPC) school. Carefully read the form and pose any questions you have.

Brandy C. Sirchia Huguet, a Liberty University doctoral candidate in the School of Education, is conducting this study.

Purpose of the study:

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to understand administrators' perceptions of their experiences sustaining PLCs.

Participation expectations:

You will be asked to create a Mind Map, a description and examples are provided for your reference, presenting your perception of your role in sustaining PLCs/cluster meetings. You will also be asked to participate in a synchronous and asynchronous virtual focus group about your role in sustaining PLCs/cluster meetings. Participation will include two synchronous meetings, one at the beginning of a two-week time period and one at the end, lasting 30-45 minutes. You will also be asked to write at least one asynchronous post during the two-week period.

Risks and benefits:

I anticipate no greater risk than any normal daily activity. The benefit gained will be an understanding administrators' perceptions of their experiences sustaining PLCs.

Compensation:

You will not be compensated for your participation in the study.

Confidentiality:

Your Mind Maps and responses to the focus group forum will be kept confidential. The results of the study will be reported without identifying you. Information collected from the focus

group forum will be kept in a locked file cabinet to which only the researcher has a key. All digital records will be stored with password protection.

Voluntary participation:

Your participation in the study is not obligatory. Interview questions you prefer not to answer may be skipped. Failure to participate in this study will not affect you in any way.

Questions:

If you have any questions please contact me, Brandy Huguet, at (). My e-mail address is bhuguet@liberty.edu.

A copy of this form will be provided for your records.

By signing below, I agree to participate in the study AND consent to having information collected from the digital focus group forum.

Signature: _____   Date: _____

Print name: _____

APPENDIX G: PLCA-R

Professional Learning Communities Assessment – Revised

Directions:

This questionnaire assesses your perceptions about your principal, staff, and stakeholders based on the dimensions of a professional learning community (PLC) and related attributes. This questionnaire contains a number of statements about practices which occur in some schools. Read each statement and then use the scale below to select the scale point that best reflects your personal degree of agreement with the statement. Shade the appropriate oval provided to the right of each statement. Be certain to select only one response for each statement. Comments after each dimension section are optional.

Key Terms:
- Principal = Principal, not Associate or Assistant Principal
- Staff/Staff Members = All adult staff directly associated with curriculum, instruction, and assessment of students
- Stakeholders = Parents and community members

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD)
2 = Disagree (D)
3 = Agree (A)
4 = Strongly Agree (SA)

	STATEMENTS				
		SCALE			
	Shared and Supportive Leadership	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
1.	Staff members are consistently involved in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.	0	0	0	0
2.	The principal incorporates advice from staff members to make decisions.	0	0	0	0
3.	Staff members have accessibility to key information.	0	0	0	0
4.	The principal is proactive and addresses areas where support is needed.	0	0	0	0
5.	Opportunities are provided for staff members to initiate change.	0	0	0	0
6.	The principal shares responsibility and rewards for innovative actions.	0	0	0	0
7.	The principal participates democratically with staff sharing power and authority.	0	0	0	0
8.	Leadership is promoted and nurtured among staff members.	0	0	0	0
9.	Decision-making takes place through committees and communication across grade and subject areas.	0	0	0	0
10.	Stakeholders assume shared responsibility and accountability for student learning without evidence of imposed power and authority.	0	0	0	0

		SD	D	A	SA
11.	Staff members use multiple sources of data to make decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

	STATEMENTS	**SCALE**			
	Shared Values and Vision	SD	D	A	SA
12.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared sense of values among staff.	0	0	0	0
13.	Shared values support norms of behavior that guide decisions about teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
14.	Staff members share visions for school improvement that have an undeviating focus on student learning.	0	0	0	0
15.	Decisions are made in alignment with the school's values and vision.	0	0	0	0
16.	A collaborative process exists for developing a shared vision among staff.	0	0	0	0
17.	School goals focus on student learning beyond test scores and grades.	0	0	0	0
18.	Policies and programs are aligned to the school's vision.	0	0	0	0
19.	Stakeholders are actively involved in creating high expectations that serve to increase student achievement.	0	0	0	0
20.	Data are used to prioritize actions to reach a shared vision.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

	Collective Learning and Application	SD	D	A	SA
21.	Staff members work together to seek knowledge, skills and strategies and apply this new learning to their work.	0	0	0	0
22.	Collegial relationships exist among staff members that reflect commitment to school improvement efforts.	0	0	0	0
23.	Staff members plan and work together to search for solutions to address diverse student needs.	0	0	0	0
24.	A variety of opportunities and structures exist for collective learning through open dialogue.	0	0	0	0
25.	Staff members engage in dialogue that reflects a respect for diverse ideas that lead to continued inquiry.	0	0	0	0

26.	Professional development focuses on teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
27.	School staff members and stakeholders learn together and apply new knowledge to solve problems.	0	0	0	0
28.	School staff members are committed to programs that enhance learning.	0	0	0	0
29.	Staff members collaboratively analyze multiple sources of data to assess the effectiveness of instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
30.	Staff members collaboratively analyze student work to improve teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0

COMMENTS:

	STATEMENTS	**SCALE**			
	Shared Personal Practice	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
31.	Opportunities exist for staff members to observe peers and offer encouragement.	0	0	0	0
32.	Staff members provide feedback to peers related to instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
33.	Staff members informally share ideas and suggestions for improving student learning.	0	0	0	0
34.	Staff members collaboratively review student work to share and improve instructional practices.	0	0	0	0
35.	Opportunities exist for coaching and mentoring.	0	0	0	0
36.	Individuals and teams have the opportunity to apply learning and share the results of their practices.	0	0	0	0
37.	Staff members regularly share student work to guide overall school improvement.	0	0	0	0

COMMENTS:

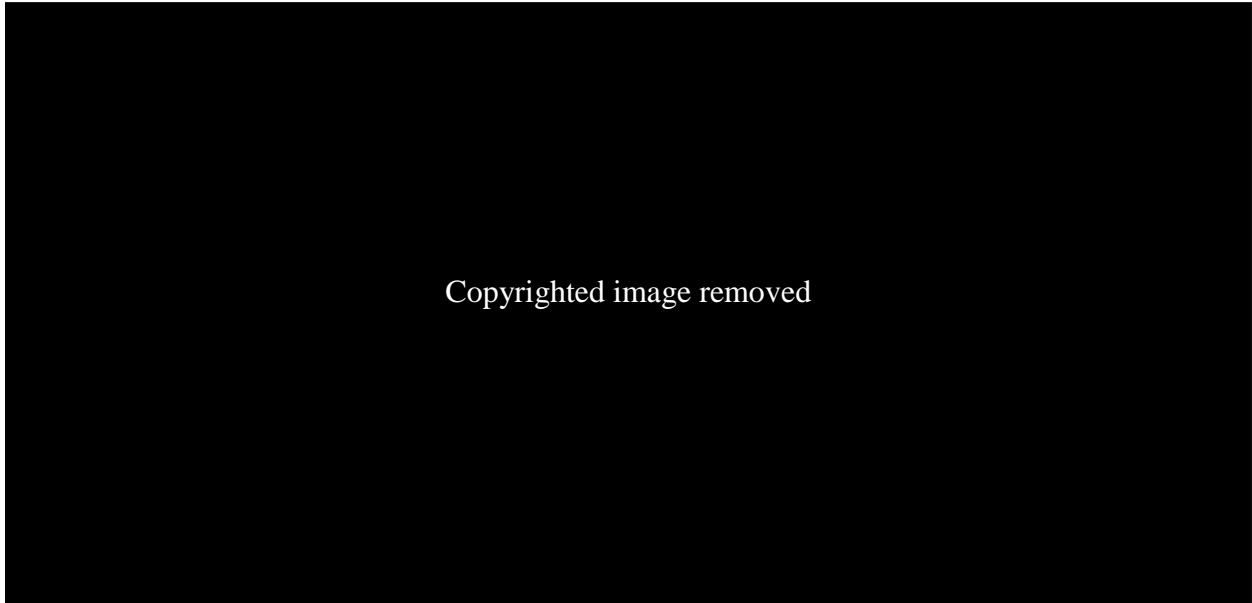|	**Supportive Conditions - Relationships**	**SD**	**D**	**A**	**SA**
38.	Caring relationships exist among staff and students that are built on trust and respect.	0	0	0	0
39.	A culture of trust and respect exists for taking risks.	0	0	0	0
40.	Outstanding achievement is recognized and celebrated regularly in our school.	0	0	0	0
41.	School staff and stakeholders exhibit a sustained and unified effort to embed change into the culture of the school.	0	0	0	0

42.	Relationships among staff members support honest and respectful examination of data to enhance teaching and learning.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					

	Supportive Conditions - Structures	SD	D	A	SA
43.	Time is provided to facilitate collaborative work.	0	0	0	0
44.	The school schedule promotes collective learning and shared practice.	0	0	0	0
45.	Fiscal resources are available for professional development.	0	0	0	0
46.	Appropriate technology and instructional materials are available to staff.	0	0	0	0
	STATEMENTS	**SCALE**			
		SD	D	A	SA
47.	Resource people provide expertise and support for continuous learning.	0	0	0	0
48.	The school facility is clean, attractive and inviting.	0	0	0	0
49.	The proximity of grade level and department personnel allows for ease in collaborating with colleagues.	0	0	0	0
50.	Communication systems promote a flow of information among staff members.	0	0	0	0
51.	Communication systems promote a flow of information across the entire school community including: central office personnel, parents, and community members.	0	0	0	0
52.	Data are organized and made available to provide easy access to staff members.	0	0	0	0
COMMENTS:					
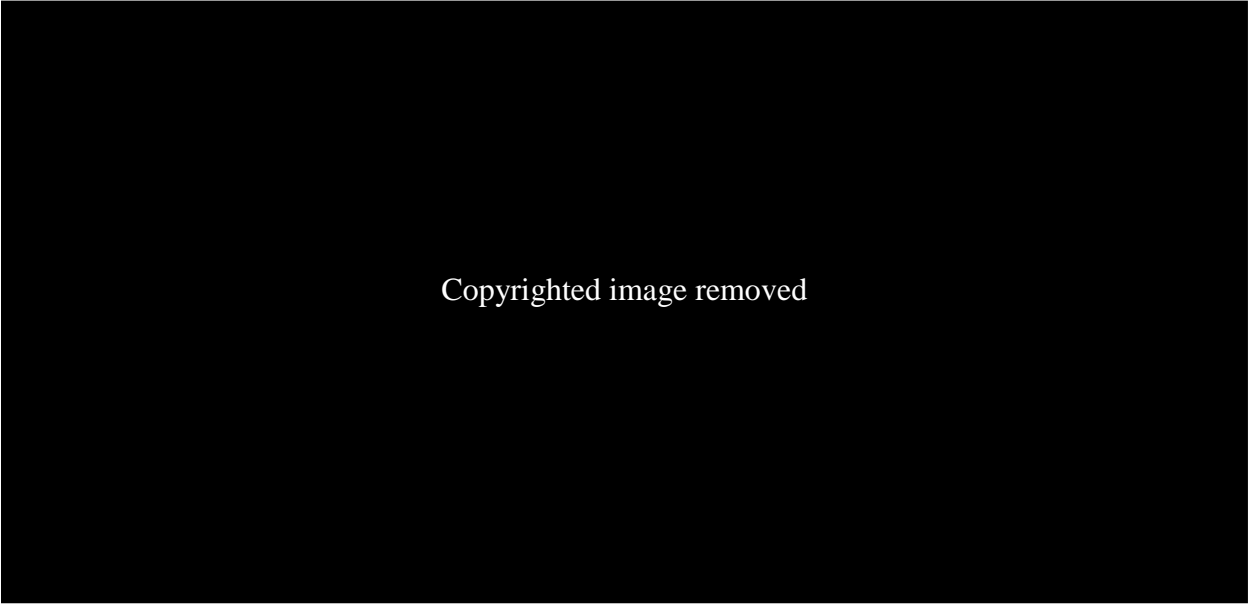
Modified with permission

APPENDIX H: Mind Map Video and Examples

Copyrighted image removed

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u5Y4pIsXTV0)
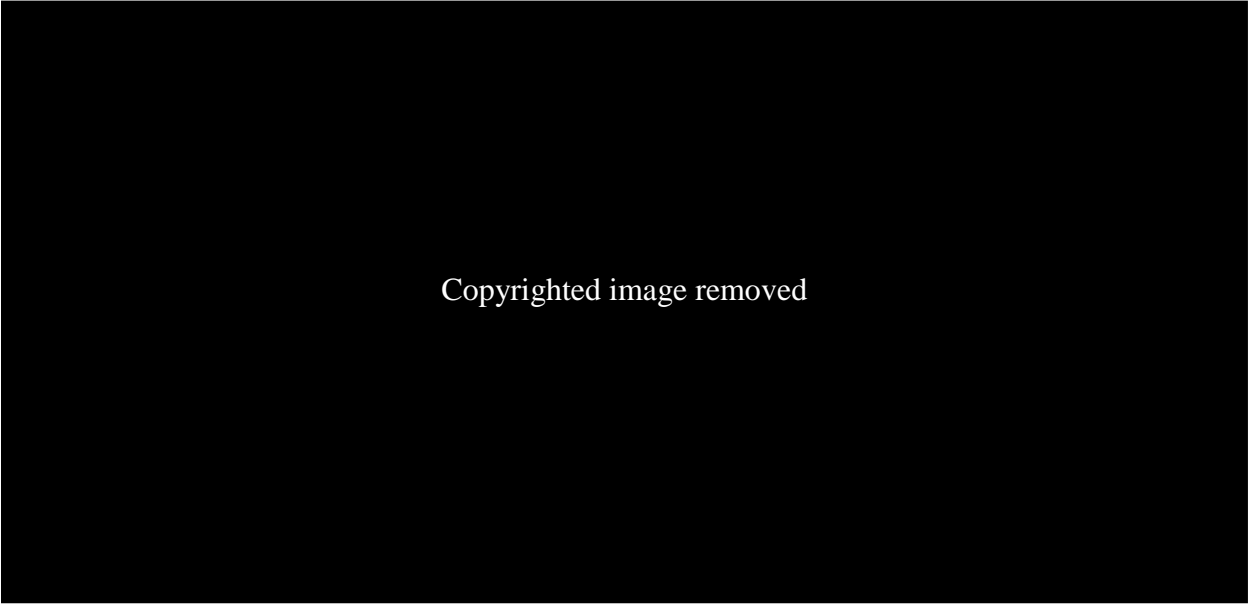
Additional information on Mind Mapping: https://imindmap.com/how-to-mind-map/

(credit: Tony Buzan: Inventor of Mind Mapping http://www.tonybuzan.com/gallery/mind-maps/)

Copyrighted image removed

(credit: Tony Buzan: Inventor of Mind Mapping http://www.tonybuzan.com/gallery/mind-maps/)

APPENDIX I: Mind Map Script

Thank you very much for your willingness to participate in this activity. You will create

a visual representation of your perception of PLCs/cluster meetings and your experience with

them. Think about the components with which you are familiar in relation to PLCs/cluster

meetings. If you had to put those concepts into a visual representation, how would you visually

demonstrate those ideas to fully encompass your perceptions and experience? You may use

hand-drawn or digitally-selected images to create your Mind Map. The term "PLC" /cluster

meeting should be at the center of your Mind Map. Please try to be concise in you wording and

use images that clearly represent your perceptions and experiences with PLCs/cluster meetings.

Think of this Mind Map as a way you would concisely share your knowledge regarding

PLCs/cluster meetings and your experience with someone having little perspective of

PLCs/cluster meetings or your experience with them. When you have completed your Mind

Map, please scan or photograph the work if hand-drawn or submit the digital document to me

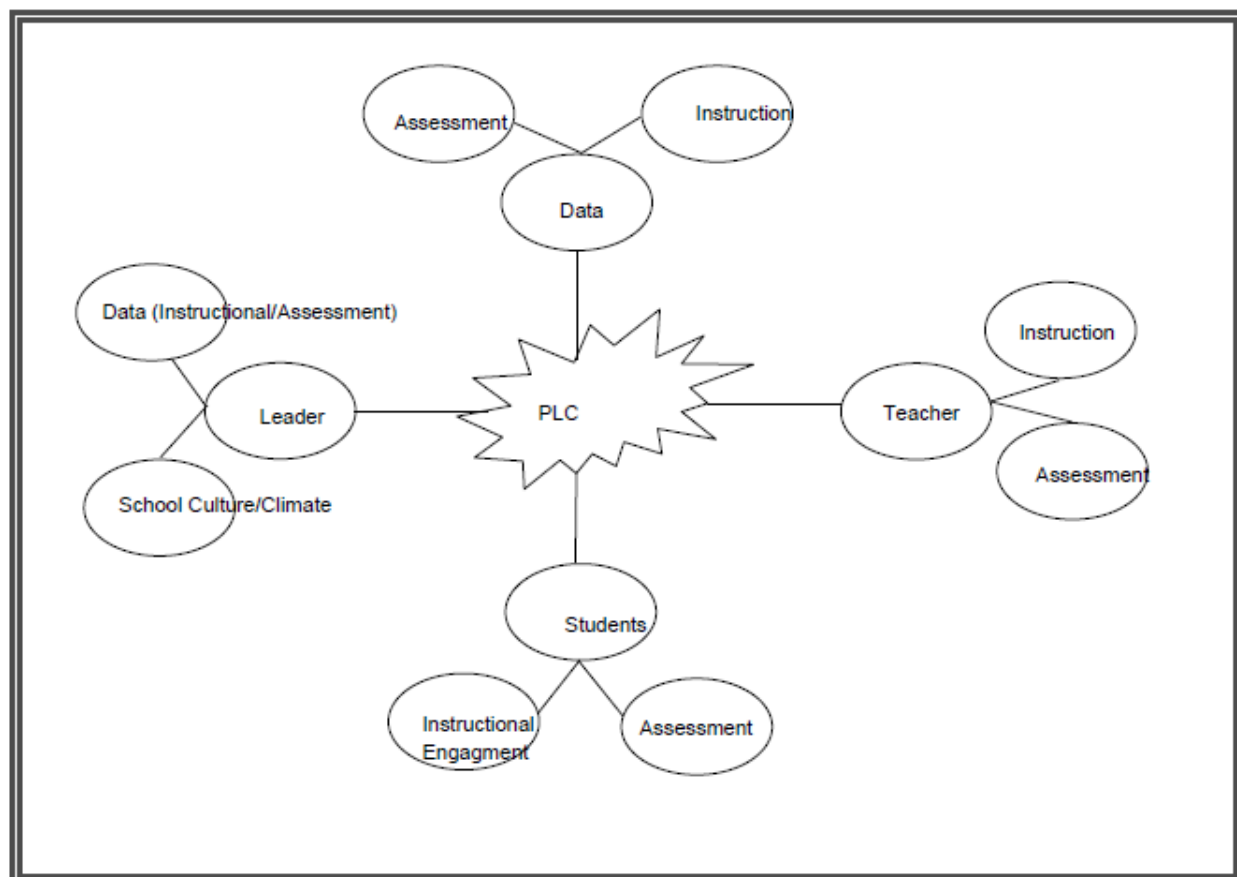through email. Thank you again for your participation.

APPENDIX J: Participant Mind Maps

Gerald
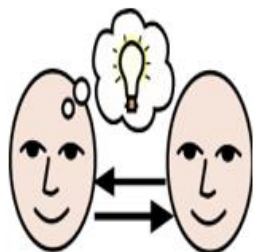
PLC/CLUSTER MEETING

Hannah

Francis