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One constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development. What continues to perplex many educational leaders is how to organize and structure meaningful learning opportunities for teachers. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine a high school's collaborative planning PLC initiative in an effort to learn more about this method of job-embedded professional development and gain insight about the effective working of PLCs in a high school setting.

The case study involved a close examination of three professional learning communities at one high school. The case school was selected because the school had experienced success with their collaborative planning PLCs as a means of professional development. Twelve teachers were interviewed as well as seven non-teacher participants. Observations of PLC collaborative planning sessions were conducted as well as a thorough analysis of collaborative planning guides completed since the onset of the initiative. The goal of this study was to deepen my understanding of this job-embedded professional development approach and the implications for practice for others considering implementing similar initiatives.

A HIGH SCHOOL'S COLLABORATIVE
PLANNING PLC INITIATIVE

by

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This work is dedicated to my husband, my daughter, and my parents.
Randy, thank you for your love, patience, and support in all that I pursue. Ashton, thank you for your encouragement and love. You are my greatest inspiration. Finally, I dedicate this work to my mom, Melissa Barbour, and in memory of my father, Brad Barbour. I will never be able to thank you enough for your love, support, and countless sacrifices.

APPROVAL PAGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES	x
LIST OF FIGURES	xi
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose of the Study	6
Research Questions	7
Summary	8
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	9
Introduction	9
Professional Development	10
Professional Development Standards	12
Professional Development Reform	13
Professional Development Designs and Delivery Models	14
Traditional Professional Development Models	14
Job-embedded Professional Development Model	16
Professional Learning Communities	18
Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning Communities	20
Collaborative Teams	21
Sustainability of Professional Learning Communities	24
Implementing PLCs: Importance of Leadership and Culture	26
Change Theory	32
Future Research	36
Conceptual Framework	36
III. METHODOLOGY	39
Introduction	39
Research Design	39
Key Concepts	41
Setting	42
Participants	45

Data Collection	47
Interviews	48
Observations	49
Documents	50
Data Analysis	51
Subjectivity and Positionality	53
Trustworthiness.....	54
Benefits of Research	55
Limitations of Research	56
Summary.....	57
IV. DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS: EMERGING THEMES	58
Introduction	58
Historical Context.....	60
Punitive Accountability	61
Competition among Colleagues	63
Changes	65
Time for Planning	66
Common Assessments	68
Collaborative Planning Documentation.....	68
Teachers' Perceptions	73
Professional Development: What Is It and What Makes It Effective?	73
The Collaborative Planning PLC Initiative: An Effective Means of Professional Development.....	77
Perceptions of Non-teacher Participants.....	80
Professional Development: What Is It and What Makes It Effective?	80
The Collaborative Planning PLC Initiative: Successful or Not.....	83
Shifts in Teacher Practice	87
Teacher Participant Reflections	87
Non-teacher Participant Reflections	90
Observed Changes in Practice	91
Summarizing Thoughts.....	93
V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS	95
Introduction	95
Research Questions	97

What Can Be Learned about Professional Development from a PLC Initiative at a NC High School?	97
Attitudes Shaped by the Historical Context of the Initiative	100
Leadership is Key	104
Time for Planning	105
Collaboration, Not Competition	106
To What Extent Do the Teachers and Non-teacher Participants Feel Participation in the Collaborative Planning PLC Initiative Has Impacted Teacher Practice?	109
Data-driven	110
Deeper Understanding of Curriculum	112
Willingness to Take Risks and Try New Things	115
Barriers and Challenges	117
Recommendations for High School Principals.....	118
Future Research	123
Conclusion	123
REFERENCES	127
APPENDIX A. TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE	135
APPENDIX B. NON-TEACHER PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW GUIDE	136
APPENDIX C. REVISED COLLABORATIVE PLANNING GUIDE	137
APPENDIX D. OBSERVATION PROTOCOL	139
APPENDIX E. STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING.....	140
APPENDIX F. ORIGINAL COLLABORATIVE PLANNING GUIDE.....	141

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1. Teacher Participants.....	46
Table 2. Non-teacher Participants.....	47

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.	37

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

These days it is not fashionable to talk about education that is humane as well as rigorous, about the importance of caring for students and honoring each one's potential. These days the talk is tough: standards must be higher and more exacting, outcomes must be measurable and comparable, accountability must be hard-edged and punitive and sanctions must be applied almost everywhere to students and teachers, especially-although not to those whose decisions determine the possibilities for learning in schools. (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 5)

Darling-Hammond's words 20 years ago depict the ever-changing educational landscape in America. Rigorous standards, challenging societal changes, and punitive accountability measures have educators searching for ways to improve student achievement as well as their professional growth. We are presently dealing with an aggressive and rapidly changing society that directly impacts schools. Our schools are challenged as they strive to balance demographic changes in an increasingly pluralistic society, with higher academic expectations. The challenges have magnified the need for quality professional development.

Guskey (2000) explains, "One constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development" (p. 4). School improvement is most thoroughly achieved when, "teachers engage in frequent, continuous and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice" (Joyce & Showers, 2002, p. 76). The conversations which can impact professional growth and yield school improvement cannot solely be in the form of polite

sharing of teaching strategies. Instead the conversations need to support the process of inquiry. The inquiry process is based upon the idea that, “understanding is constructed in the process of people working and conversing together as they pose and solve the problems, make discoveries and rigorously testing the discoveries that arise in the course of shared activity” (Galileo, n.d.). The inquiry process is important for both teachers and students and can be supported by professional learning communities (PLCs). PLCs are described as, “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2010, p. 11).

Providing teachers with quality professional development has become ever more important. Professional learning communities can be an extremely effective means of developing the capacity of teachers. An effective professional learning community has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective, moral purpose of improving student learning (Bolam et al., 2005).

Despite evidence that indicates the importance of collaboration, many teachers continue to work in isolation (Reitzug & O’Hair, 2002). Collaboration is a critical component of PLCs which can be an effective form of job-embedded professional learning. DuFour (2004) describes a PLC as a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. DuFour (2004) also reports that improved student achievement is possible, when teachers engage collaboratively, working in teams and engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team

learning. Effective collaboration in PLCs can better prepare teachers to meet the rigorous demands of the profession.

Problem Statement

Guskey (2002) describes professional development as processes designed to improve knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators. School districts are increasingly challenged to provide quality professional development that focuses on building teacher capacity. What continues to perplex many educational leaders is how to organize and structure meaningful learning opportunities for teachers. Much of my work involves building teacher capacity and helping them grow as instructional leaders. After analyzing the teacher feedback from past district professional development sessions, my colleagues and I realized reforming many existing professional development practices was necessary. Two or three calendar days are designated for teacher professional development each year. Teacher feedback from the district wide professional development indicates many teachers dread attending. Not only did we need to work on the district professional development offered within our department, but we also knew we needed to do more to support teacher learning in their own schools.

The National Staff Development Council has lobbied specifically for job-embedded professional learning (Reeves, 2009). Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) refers to teacher learning that is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). It is typically school based and ongoing. Job-embedded learning

links learning to current challenges faced by teachers and administrators. It allows for immediate application and adaptation on the job (Sparks, 2005).

With the onset on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) which was signed into law in January, 2002, accountability has become a focus when planning school reform initiatives. NCLB mandated standardized testing in reading and mathematics for students in grades 3-8 to measure grade level competencies. While the testing will remain, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) which was signed into law in December, 2015, has eliminated the punitive high stakes measures and given local and state governments more flexibility. Measuring student achievement through standardized assessments has put added pressure on school districts, school leaders, and teachers. This accountability is also tied to teacher evaluations in 35 states (Doherty & Jacobs, 2013). According to Hightower et al. (2011), “Teacher evaluations are currently undergoing a shift from traditional classroom observations that overwhelmingly rate teachers as “satisfactory” while providing little actionable feedback for educators toward approaches that link teacher practice to student achievement” (p. 15). This emphasis on testing has re-emphasized the need for quality professional development designed to build teacher capacity.

ESSA also emphasizes the importance of student growth which utilizes academic indicators that reflect the whole student, as well as the growth that student has made. The school district that is the focus of this qualitative case study is committed to student growth. In a district that strives to achieve growth for every child, what professional development strategies would be most beneficial? Observations in secondary schools,

particularly high schools, revealed that teacher planning is an area of concern. After the district received disappointing achievement data for the 2012-2013 school year, it was decided to extend professional learning into certain schools through structured collaboration focusing on utilization of achievement data and sound instructional practices.

In middle schools throughout the district, it is not uncommon to see an emphasis on teacher collaboration and planning. However, much of the collaboration occurring in the district's high schools is not as deliberate or intentional. The collaborative planning PLC initiative at the high school in this case study was implemented in an effort to improve instructional practice and ultimately student achievement. The initiative requires teachers to commit time weekly to plan collaboratively with their peers. Initially the planning time was after school; however, beginning in the 2015-2016 school year, the master schedule allowed for common planning time during the instructional day for Biology, Math I, and English II teachers. Each of these subjects has a state standardized exam that students must take at the completion of the course. According to Fullan (1993), schools in which teachers participate in structured collaboration, examining and discussing teaching, learning, and instructional practices, can improve academic results for students more quickly than those that do not take part in these practices.

While teachers at the case high school within this study may have occasionally planned together before the initiative, their work was not as focused or deliberate. The collaborative planning PLC initiative requires teachers to meet weekly with the support of administrators and district level specialists. The principal and lead assistant principal

attend the sessions but the support for planning comes primarily from the district level specialists and the formative assessment coach. The curriculum specialists help with analyzing data, as well as provide instructional strategies to support teaching the standards. During these planning sessions, teachers analyze student data from common assessments they create during the sessions. Data from district common assessments is also analyzed. The teachers within the Biology, Math I, and English II PLCs plan lessons, structure remediation efforts, and work together to find solutions to problems that are barriers to student success. During each session the teachers complete a collaborative planning guide (Appendix C) that was designed by the district to support teachers as they plan aligned, student-centered, data-driven instructional lessons.

There is little doubt that professional development of educators is critical. However, what remains in question is what forms of professional learning transform teacher practice and improve student achievement. Researchers claim that teachers can create engaging learning opportunities for students when they are supported with extensive, well-designed, and rich professional learning (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009). Examining professional learning and collaborative planning within PLCs provides additional insight for other educators who are seeking to improve or implement a similar initiative.

Purpose of the Study

As an educational leader, I am concerned about the lack of influential professional learning in schools. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to examine the work in three professional learning communities at one high school. I wanted to fully examine the

collaborative planning PLC initiative, as well as how teachers perceive their experiences within these PLCs.

The Glossary of Education Reform (2014) defines collaborative planning as any period of time that is scheduled for multiple teachers, or teams of teachers, to work together. Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom (2015) shared that collaborative learning gives teachers the opportunity to collaborate and learn in a supportive environment that organizes curriculum across grade levels and subjects.

Education is complex, and it is impossible to prove that professional development is the only contributor to educational improvement (Guskey, 2000). However, Guskey (2000) also claims, “in the absence of proof, you can collect very good evidence about whether or not professional development is contributing to specific gains in student learning” (p. 87). The purpose of this study is to examine a high school’s collaborative planning PLC initiative in an effort to learn more about this method of job-embedded professional development and gain insight about the effective working of PLCs in a high school setting.

Research Questions

This study examines the collaborative planning PLC initiative by analyzing perceptual data collected from teacher participants and administrators.

The research questions include:

- What can be learned about professional development from a PLC initiative at a NC high school?
 - What can be learned from the following:

- The historical context from which the initiative developed
 - The changes that happened and the structures that were created
 - Teachers' perceptions of the initiative
 - Other involved non-teacher participants' perceptions
- To what extent do teachers and non-teacher participants feel participation in the collaborative planning PLC initiative has impacted teacher practice?

Summary

This first chapter described my personal interest in conducting the research study. I also shared background information for the study including: the problem statement and the guiding research questions. Chapter II consists of a thorough review of the research on professional development, including research on job-embedded professional development and professional learning communities. I also share the conceptual framework I created based on the insight gained from my review of the literature. Chapter III details the methodology utilized for this research study. Information regarding the setting, participants, and my research design and methods is shared. In Chapter IV the data collected through the interviews, observations, and document analysis are presented. Chapter IV will highlight the lived experiences of the teachers and non-teachers participating in the collaborative planning PLC initiative. Chapter V summarizes my findings, articulated my own personal interpretations of the data, and provides implications for future implementation of similar PLC initiatives.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In *The Need for Meaningful Professional Development*, Miller (2012) stated,

Whenever I attend professional development sessions at my school I feel like I am either wasting away my life, serving a mandatory bid of servitude, or dying a very slow and tortuous death. Amongst the various thoughts that pass through my mind as I earnestly try to distract myself while appearing as though I am paying attention, is a thought that visits about every five minutes: we teachers need better professional development opportunities . . . As a professional, I want to grow; I want to get better. I don't want to daydream about what I could be doing when I should be doing professional development. I am not asking for a doctoral program. I am simply looking for something I can implement the next day and the days after that. I am looking for an honest dialogue on issues of teaching and learning and ways to be more effective in the classroom. I want to learn . . . I want to improve . . . I want instruction and direction . . . (para. 1)

Many teachers share the same negative sentiments in regards to professional development. Unfortunately, a large number of educators are not satisfied with their professional learning experiences. This is extremely perplexing considering the fact that schools are currently charged with meeting increasing demands of diverse student populations. Schools and districts must address issues such as the achievement gap and new curriculum standards, as well as numerous other challenges of the 21st century that make professional development even more important. Guskey (2000) explains, “One constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development” (p. 4). What do

teachers view as quality professional development, and how can we ensure we are meeting their professional learning needs in this ever-changing society? The review of the literature defines professional development and examines how it has evolved into more collaborative opportunities. The concept of job-embedded professional development, specifically professional learning communities is examined. The literature review also examines barriers to the sustainability of PLCs.

Guskey (2002) describes professional development as processes designed to improve knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators. School districts are increasingly challenged to provide quality professional development that focuses on building teacher capacity. What continues to perplex many educational leaders is how to organize and structure meaningful learning opportunities for teachers.

Professional Development

We Learn . . .
10% of what we read
20% of what we hear
30% of what we see
50% of what we see and hear
70% of what we discuss
80% of what we experience
95% of what we teach others.
~William Glasser

Research has revealed that the success of students depends heavily on teacher effectiveness (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Teachers impact student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sparks, Hirsch, 2000), and according to Guskey (2003), this is a primary reason for conducting professional development. Guskey (2000) defined

professional development as, “processes, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn improve the learning of students” (p. 16). Darling-Hammond and Richardson (2009) explains it is the facilitation of teacher learning designed to improve instruction and ultimately student achievement.

Learning Forward, formerly known as the National Staff Development Council, worked with numerous educational organizations to develop the Standards for Professional Learning. (Appendix E) The Standards for Professional Learning are the third version of these standards. The standards outline, “characteristics of professional learning that lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results” (<https://learningforward.org/standards>). The standards clearly articulate that the purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions they need to help improve student achievement.

The research consistently describes professional development and stresses the importance of improving teacher effectiveness in an effort to improve student outcomes (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2000).

According to Ende (2016) the 1970s marked a drastic increase in teachers engaging in professional development. However, much of the professional development was not provided in a way that had a positive long-term impact on teaching and learning. Unfortunately, almost 50 years later, professional development has largely remained the same (Ende, 2016). Professional development can have a powerful effect if designed and delivered in an effective way.

The importance of professional development in the education profession is recognized throughout the literature. The nation's newest education law, ESSA, redefined professional development for teachers. The No Child Left Behind Act vaguely described professional development as, "activities that improve teachers' knowledge in the subjects they teach, allow them to become highly qualified, and advance their understanding of instructional strategies" (Pierce, 2016). ESSA refined the definition explaining, "The term professional development means activities that are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short-term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom focused" (Pierce, 2016). This law emphasizes that professional development should be personalized and evidence-based, which is a shift from how most schools offer professional development for teachers.

How can something so significant frequently be regarded as ineffective and lacking purpose? Educators often regard professional development as having very little impact on their professional practice and consider it to be a waste of time. In many cases teachers participate only because they have to (Guskey, 2000). Purposeful, well-planned, and research based professional development can be effective. However, educators have done a poor job evaluating professional development and documenting what aspects contribute most to its effectiveness (Guskey, 2000).

Professional Development Standards

Professional development allows educators the opportunities deepen content knowledge and develop an understanding of how to utilize the content knowledge to improve instructional practice (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2005). Learning Forward

solicited the help of educational organizations to create the seven new standards.

(Appendix E) These new standards focus on professional learning as it relates to improved student learning. Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students is the focus of each of the seven standards which include: learning communities, leadership, resources, data, learning designs, implementation, and outcomes.

The standards have four prerequisites for effective professional learning. The prerequisites are: educators' commitment to all students; each educator participating in professional learning must come eager to learn; professional learning can foster collaborative inquiry and learning that enhances individual and collective performance; and educators learn in different ways and at different rates. When educational leaders organize professional learning aligned with the standards, and the prerequisites for effective professional learning are in place, student learning will increase.

The Standards for Professional Learning (Appendix E) describe what professional learning for educators should consist of. The standards which were revised in 2011, continue to provide quality indicators for those developing, facilitating, and participating in professional development. The seven standards provide guidance for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning.

Professional Development Reform

The current era of educational reform which emphasizes high stakes testing and accountability, has magnified the need for quality professional development.

Standardized tests and value added measures have both teachers and educational leaders

looking for solutions to solve disparities and to increase student achievement. High quality professional development is a central tenant in every modern proposal aimed at reforming or transforming schools. Unfortunately, research indicates that traditional models of professional development remain ineffective in their efforts to reform teacher practice. Traditionally these consist of workshops or sit-and-get training sessions that are often tied directly to content rather than to instructional practice (Guskey, 2000).

In 2001, NSDC revised its professional development standards. Professional development is used to describe various types of facilitated learning opportunities. Prior to the 21st century, the term was interchangeably with staff development. In September, 2010, The NSDC became known as Learning Forward. This change was in response to the organizations growth and vision. The change within this organization is representative of a shift in regards to professional development. Sparks and Hirsh (1997) acknowledge a shift in professional development which has educators looking for learning opportunities beyond those that are conducted away from their jobs.

Professional Development Designs and Delivery Models

Traditional Professional Development Models

There are several different types of professional development. Traditional professional development is a delivery model which refers to workshops and conferences while another common design involves job-embedded learning (Elmore, 2004).

According to Reitzug (2002), “Training” is, “the traditional, and still dominant, form and includes workshops, presentations, and other types of in-service” (p. 237). Traditional professional development activities such as workshops, conferences, and guest speakers

have received criticism. Sparks and Hirsh (2000) refer to these as “adult pull-out programs” which may or may not be connected to specific school goals. A specific example of a traditional model of professional development is the one day training or workshop, sometimes referred to as a “dog and pony show” (Fogarty, & Pete, 2007). Traditional workshops are typically not effective for reasons which include: the lack of engagement for teachers; an abundance of information shared in one session; and no opportunity for participant reflection (Chappuis, Chappuis, & Stiggins, 2009). These same activities often have little to no follow-up and do not have observable impact on education because they do not help teachers transfer new learning into the classroom (Galbo, 1998; Sparks & Hirsh, 2000).

Reeves (2010) asserts that teachers and school need high-impact professional development which consists of the following characteristics: a focus on student learning, rigorous measurement of adult decisions, and a focus on people and practices, not programs. He explains,

We know what effective professional learning looks like. It is intensive and sustained, it is directly relevant to the needs of teachers and students, and it provides opportunities for application, practice, reflection, and reinforcement. We also know what it doesn't look like: death by PowerPoint, ponderous lectures from people who have not been alone with a group of students for decades, and high-decibel whining about the state of (take your pick) children, parents, teachers, public education, and Western Civilization. (p. 23)

Phenomenal speakers and workshops may have some instructional value, but it is the role of educational leaders to help teachers to translate their learning into what Reeves (2010) refers to as high-impact professional learning.

According to Sparks and Hirsh (2000) effective professional development consists of the following: results-driven and job-embedded; focused on helping teachers become immersed in content matter and pedagogy; curriculum centered and standards based; sustained, rigorous, and cumulative; and directly related to what is taking place within the classroom. Effective professional development makes the connection between content and pedagogy and allows for professional collaboration. Effective professional development also requires considerable time, and that time must be well organized, carefully structured, purposefully directed, and focused on content or pedagogy or both (Guskey & Yoon, 2009). In an effort to provide effective professional development opportunities for teachers, many are transitioning from traditional methods of professional development to job-embedded learning.

Job-embedded Professional Development Model

A second type of professional development involves job-embedded learning opportunities. Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) refers to teacher learning that is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995). Job-embedded professional development, which became popular in the 1990's, is based on the assumption that the most powerful learning occurs in response to current challenges being faced by teachers (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000).

JEPD is characterized by teacher engagement through learning activities such as collaborative study groups which allow teachers to investigate aspects of student learning (Croft et al., 2010). JEPD includes processes such as inquiry, discussion, collaboration,

and problem solving as well as new structures which include problem-solving groups, decision-making teams, and common planning periods (Reitzug, 2002). Intensive, job-embedded professional development which is focused on content is more likely to yield the desired results of improved teacher knowledge and improve student achievement (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet et al., 2002; Guskey, 2003). If effectively implemented and supported, JEPD can potentially contribute to the professional development of teachers by generating conversations around effective teaching and learning (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009).

Job-embedded professional learning typically occurs over an extended period of time, within in the school environment, and when possible is integrated within the school day. According to Couros (2015),

As leaders, if we ask teachers to use their own time to do anything what we're really telling them is: it's not important. The focus on compliance and implementation of programs in much of today's professional development does not inspire teachers to be creative, nor does it foster a culture of innovation. (p. 5)

JEPD often consists of teachers assessing immediate problems of practice and seeking solutions. According to Zepeda (2013),

job-embedded learning links learning to the immediate and real-life problems faced by teachers and administrators. It is based on the assumption that the most powerful learning is that which occurs in response to challenges currently being faced by the learner and that allows for immediate application, experimentation and adaptation on the job. (p. 125)

JEPD may consist of departmental meetings, cross-curricular, or vertical (across grade levels) teams of teachers engaging together in “interactive, integrative, practical, and

results oriented work” (Fogarty & Pete, 2007, p. 32). According to Croft, Coggshall, Dolan, Powers, and Killion (2010), professional learning communities can also be effective forums for effective JEPD, which is described as professional development which leads to improved practice and ultimately improved student learning outcomes.

Professional Learning Communities

In recent years, educators have witnessed a paradigm shift in regards to professional development. Traditional methods are being replaced and professional development is being moved into the schools through job-embedded learning. Job-embedded professional development links learning to immediate real-life challenges. While positive learning can take place in single sessions or workshops, research indicates that professional learning communities (PLCs) and learning teams are continuing to grow in popularity (DuFour, 2004). PLCs are essentially collaborative teams in which members effectively work together to achieve common goals (DuFour et al., 2010). They require continuous learning in a job-embedded setting. Guskey (2003) emphasized the importance of structure and purposeful collaboration.

Over the last decade, professional learning communities (PLCs) have become increasingly popular and have also come to mean a variety of things depending on the school or school district. PLCS have become so commonplace that the term is often used to refer to practically any form of collaboration. Many schools claiming to operate as PLCs have shown little evidence of the core concepts or practices of PLCs (DuFour et. al, 2005). While the term has become widespread, the practices of PLCs have not (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). There are multiple definitions and variations for PLCs. PLCs are

described as, “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (DuFour et al., 2010). Hord (1997b) defines PLCs as a group of professionals who learn and work together, using what is learned to increase their instructional capacity for their students.

DuFour’s three big ideas which encompass the core principles of professional learning communities are: ensuring that students learn, a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). DuFour’s big ideas require professionals to ask questions such as, “1. What do we want students to learn? 2. How will we know when the student has learned it? 3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?” (DuFour, 2004). The emphasis on student learning is a cornerstone for PLCs; however, it does not diminish the importance of teaching. The PLC process is designed and intended to, “create the conditions that help educators become more skillful in teaching because great teaching and high levels of learning go hand in hand” (DuFour & Marzano, 2011, p. 23).

Hord (1997b) noted that there is no universally accepted definition of PLCs and explains that her description of PLCs was conceptualized after a thorough review of the literature. Hord (1997b) argues that PLCs share the following traits: supportive and shared leadership, shared values and leadership, collective learning and application of learning, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice. DuFour (2004) and Hord (1997a) both recognize the importance of collaboration and leadership. Developing

professional learning communities takes time and intentional effort from administration (Morrisey, 2000).

Despite evidence which indicates the importance of collaboration, many teachers continue to work in isolation (DuFour, 2004). Even schools which promote collaboration have teachers who are often resistant. What is meant by collaboration is often viewed differently from school to school. PLCs have become so common in education that the term is often used to describe practically any form of collaboration. Collaboration is a critical component of PLCs which DuFour (2004) describes as a “systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice” (p. 9). DuFour (2004) also reports that improved student achievement is possible, when teachers engage collaboratively, working in teams and engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. Being collegial is not enough. The work in PLCs must be deliberate, focused, and intentional. Implementing substantive change is difficult even when people have a genuine understanding of the process; however, it is impossible to do with ambiguity of purpose (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Characteristics of Effective Professional Learning Communities

Hargreaves and Giles (2003), as cited in Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, and Thomas (2006), describe how a strong PLC “brings together the knowledge, skills and dispositions of teachers in a school or across schools to promote shared learning and improvement. A strong professional learning community is a social process for turning information into knowledge” (p. 242). The literature reveals that the key or central purpose of PLCs is “to enhance teacher effectiveness as professionals, for students’

ultimate benefit” (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 229). Professional learning communities are a means to an end, and the goal must be more than simply becoming a professional learning community (Morrisey, 2000). Fullan (2005) explains that effective PLCs engage in disciplined inquiry in an effort to “raise the bar” and “close the gap” of student learning and achievement (p. 209).

Stoll et al. (2006) suggest that a PLC’s effectiveness be judged on three criteria: the ultimate impact on pupil learning and social development, the impact on professional learning, performance and morale, and its operational performance as a PLC. Their research also indicates,

Effective professional learning communities fully exhibit eight key characteristics: shared values and vision; collective responsibility for pupils’ learning; collaboration focused on learning; individual and collective professional learning; reflective professional enquiry; openness, networks and partnerships; inclusive membership; mutual trust, respect and support. (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 145)

An effective professional learning community has the capacity to promote and sustain the learning of all professionals in the school community with the collective, moral purpose of improving student learning (Bolam et al., 2005).

Collaborative Teams

DuFour et al. (2010) argue that PLCs are essentially results-oriented collaborative teams of teachers who concentrate on improving teaching and learning. The collaborative team whose members work interdependently to achieve common goals is the basic structure of a PLC (DuFour et al., 2010). In the last two decades, the power of teams and collaborative learning has been more frequently examined. Knight (2011) describes the

importance of collaboration and states, “In education collective intelligence is celebrated through several approaches to collaborative learning already being implemented carefully in schools, including data teams, professional learning communities, and positive behavior supports” (p. 176). Senge (1990), as cited in Knight (2011), expressed the importance learning teams in which “people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together” (p. 176).

School-based teacher collaboration, inquiry, and learning are at the forefront of school reform efforts aimed at improving student achievement (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009). Research shows that when teachers have time and tools to collaborate, their instructional practice improves which ultimately impacts student achievement. DuFour and Marzano (2011) share the importance of establishing and maintaining meaningful teams. In a secondary school, this is typically same course or grade level teams. Recent research indicates that these kinds of job-alike learning teams generally improve learning for both teachers and students. Little (2006), as cited in DuFour and Marzano (2011) also argues that “teachers are more likely to improve their practice when their learning is content based and they work with colleagues to focus on the curriculum, instruction, and assessment linked to their subject” (p. 72).

A five-year longitudinal study which investigated the significance of grade level teams in nine Title I schools, found that there was a positive correlation between the collaboration which occurred in learning teams and student achievement (Saunders et al.,

2009). The quasi-experimental trial reported evidence which indicated, “grade-level teams focused on improving student learning can produce school-level effects of both statistical and practical significance” (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 1026). Interestingly, the described effects only occurred in the second phase of the survey. When no significant change was evident within the first two years, an explicit protocol was introduced. A component of the protocol required collaborative planning among teachers (Saunders et al., 2010).

Goodard, Goodard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) reported a correlation between collaboration among teachers and student achievement. Teachers from 47 elementary schools were surveyed to find out how much time they were allocated to collaborate with peers. The research indicated that student achievement data was higher in schools with more time for allocated for teacher collaboration (Goodard et al., 2007). Raywid, as cited by Many (2009), argues, “Collaborative time for teachers to undertake and sustain school improvement may be more important than equipment, facilities, or even staff development” (p. 8). In another study, collaboration emerged as the most important characteristic of a professional learning community (Johnson, 2013). In Johnson’s (2013) qualitative study, participants reported that they felt collaboration, or continuous sharing and problem solving, was the key. Collaboration encompasses many characteristics of PLCs. Essentially it is what drives improvement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011).

Knight (2011) shares the philosophy of James Surowiecki whose research has made the case for the impact and power that group learning can have. Surowiecki’s (2004) as cited by Knight (2011) argues that, “on average [a group] will consistently

come up with a better answer than any individual can provide” (p. 176). There is benefit to teachers working in collaborative teams if they have open dialogue about what practices can help improve student achievement.

Sustainability of Professional Learning Communities

Another trait of successful PLCs is sustainability (Hord, 1997a). Sustainability is one of the challenges facing professional learning communities. Sustaining reform requires more than mere strategies. Michael Fullan (2005) explains, “There is a growing problem in large-scale reform; namely, the terms travel well, but the underlying conceptualization and thinking do not” (p. 10). Fullan (2005) defines sustainability as the “capacity of a system to engage in the complexities of continuous improvement consistent with deep values of human purpose” (p. ix). Hargreaves and Fink (2000) explain that sustainability means much more than whether or not something will last. They note that sustainability “addresses how particular initiatives can be developed without compromising the development of others in the surrounding environment now and in the future” (p. 32).

One barrier to sustaining PLCs is a lack of genuine understanding as to what a PLC actually is. Schmoker (2004) argues that “clarity precedes competence” (p. 85). Failure of PLCs can stem from confusion about fundamental concepts and underlying principles of PLCs including what is meant by collaboration (Sparks, 2005). PLCs have been used ambiguously to describe virtually any loose coupling of individuals sharing a common educational interest (DuFour et al., 2005). Sustainability is not likely when schools and districts which claim to embrace the tenets of professional learning

communities demonstrate little evidence of understanding or implementing the practices of PLCs. Schools cannot implement PLCs with fidelity if all participants do not fully understand the purpose and essential characteristics.

Giles and Hargreaves (2006) explain the three factors that contribute to a decline or eventual demise of PLCs in two schools. The factors include: a lack of support from peers, leadership changes, and attrition and changes in external context. Giles and Hargreaves's (2006) longitudinal study also examines a third school, Blue Mountain, to determine whether or not the consciously designed PLC has the potential to offset the threats to sustainability. Their findings indicate that PLCs appear to have the ability to offset some forces that threaten a PLC's sustainability such as standardization and attrition of change, which occurs when leaders and key faculty leave. Developing positive relationships with other schools and involving the community in the decision making are compensatory strategies (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006). More importantly, schools can manage attrition of change by "renewing their teacher cultures, distributing leadership, and planning for leadership succession" (Giles & Hargreaves, 2006).

In their review of the literature as well as their case study findings, Stoll et al. (2006), identify four key PLC processes for promoting and sustaining an effective PLC. The processes include: optimizing resources and structures; promoting individual and collective learning; promoting and sustaining the PLC; and leadership (Stoll et al., 2006). Their findings indicate the effectiveness of the processes differed from school to school and sustainability was challenged when circumstances such as a change in staff or leadership occurred.

Educational reform is not easy and requires hard work. The concept of PLCs is a powerful educational reform model which requires hard work. PLCs require, “more than adopting new mission statements, launching strategic plans, or flying banners claiming ‘we are a learning community’” (DuFour et al., 2005, p. 10). Collins (2001) explains that

Good to great comes by a cumulative process—step by step, action by action, decision by decision, turn upon turn of the flywheel—that adds up to sustained and spectacular results. It was a quiet, deliberate process of figuring out what needed to be done to create the best future results and then taking those steps one way or the other. By pushing in a constant direction over an extended period of time, they inevitably hit a point of breakthrough. (p. 169)

Professional learning communities can be an effective form of professional development.

Implementing PLCs: Importance of Leadership and Culture

Professional learning communities require a shift in thinking about teaching from an isolated endeavor to a collaborative effort. Hord and Tobia (2012) acknowledge that implementing effective PLCs requires a substantial shift in culture. According to Hord and Tobia, “It is a real challenge for teachers who are comfortable working in isolation to instantly become members of a PLC” (p. 44). For teachers to be willing to take risks and try new strategies, they must feel empowered and supported to do so.

Senge et al. (2000) note there are two key components of systemic change in the school setting. They are 1) to involve a principal who believes in the potential of a learning organization, and 2) have the skills to build a community of collaborative learners. If principals are the leaders who reculture schools into communities where all students and teachers learn, then one of the behaviors a principal must possess is the ability to collaborate (Hord, 1997b). Alignment between actual and expected leadership

practices has been highlighted in studies indicating principals' leadership practices are the best predictors for the presence of either high or low participation by teachers in change efforts (Huffman & Jacobson, 2010).

Senge (1990) emphasized the role of the leader as designer, steward, and teacher, one who is responsible for setting a high standard for continuous learning. Fullan (2001) defined leadership as helping others to confront problems that have not yet been addressed successfully. In their review of prominent leadership theorists, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) noted Burns's (1978) definition of leadership as ". . . leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivation of both leaders and followers" (p. 13).

DuFour (1999) has given the following recommendations about the principal's role in a professional learning community:

1. Principals should lead through shared vision rather than rules and procedures;
2. Principals should enlist faculty members in the schools' decision-making processes and empower individuals to act;
3. Principals should provide the staff with the information, training, and parameters to make good decisions;
4. Principals should be results oriented (p. 13).

Spillane, Halverson, and Diamond (2004) examine the prevailing assumption that school leadership is essentially the principal. In their distributed leadership model, leadership involves all activities started by those who lead in particular contexts and in fulfillment of specific tasks. Therefore, leaders, followers, and other stakeholders must be included in order to generate a definitive understanding of the practice of school

leadership. Teacher-leaders pursuing leadership roles do so from a perspective that is distinctly different from the principal. The character and structure of their interactions are important to understanding leadership practice. Spillane et al.'s (2004) distributed leadership perspective suggests collective interactions among leaders working together can serve to vastly increase leadership practice. The authors determine that school leadership might be best explored at the group or collective level rather than at the individual level.

Researching the qualities of leadership crucial to educational change has not always yielded uniform results, and more research is needed to examine the qualities that principals must possess in order to navigate a school through deep change (Mendez-Morse, 1992). Professional development is an educational reform initiative. Implementing effective professional development requires both principal and teacher leadership. Using peer-reviewed journals over a span of ten years, Neumerski (2012) explored the possibility of principals, teacher leaders, and instructional coaches serving as instructional leaders. Neumerski (2012) suggests school leaders should not only be managers, but instructional leaders focused on teaching and learning. Principals' work is to be focused on the teaching and learning that is occurring in the building between teachers and students (p. 318). Although principal leadership is necessary for a school to thrive, Neumerski's (2012) review of literature suggests the principal's effect on student learning is indirect and small. However, the principal's role in leading and supporting professional development can positively impact teacher learning which does influence student learning.

In recent years, more attention has been given to the idea of teacher leadership. Teacher leaders promote changes in instruction (Neumerski, 2012). According to Neumerski (2012), there is no consistent definition of teacher leaders in the literature even though they possess similar behaviors, i.e., “. . . building trust, collaborating, communicating, and modeling” (p. 321). Teachers are placed in leadership positions because most of the knowledge required for academic improvement must come from the people who deliver instruction and not from the people who manage those (Neumerski, 2012). Teachers play an instrumental role in the success of a PLC.

Thompson, Gregg, and Niska (2004) conducted a study which examined what PLCs look like in middle schools. The study included interviews of each principal and the teachers. The interviews with teachers stress the importance of shared vision and leadership. The findings also indicate that PLCs need leaders who encourage Peter Senge’s five disciplines and understand the importance of, “data informed decisions, relationships, and risk taking, to create a learning organization” (Thompson et al., 2004, p. 12). Wells and Feun (2013) conducted a study which documents the progress of eight middle schools in two different school districts, implementing PLCs. The quantitative and qualitative results in this study reveal the importance of leadership strategies in one of the districts. In this particular district leadership ensured, “the message of change was emphasized, nurtured, and sustained with consistency over a period of several years” (Wells & Feun, 2013, p. 257). The importance of administrative leadership was not the focus of this study; however, the results did emphasize the importance of such leadership.

PLCs have become increasingly popular in education over the last few decades. As the review of the literature indicated, the term PLC has become widespread, even if their practices have not. While many schools claim to operate as PLCs, they are merely PLCs in name only. However, the review of the literature did include examples of successful PLCs which have sustained over time.

According to Guskey (2000), “Educators at all levels must be continuous learners throughout the entire span of their professional careers” (p. 19). There is evidence that quality professional development can impact effectiveness of instruction as well as student achievement (Reeves, 2010; Guskey, 2003; Fullan, Hill, & Crévola, 2006). However, finding the right professional development for teachers and schools remains a challenge. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) explain there is no one size fits all approach for student or adult learners. Professional development has changed extensively over the last two decades. There has been a shift from traditional models of professional development to more collaborative and job-embedded opportunities for learning. As accountability measures become even more stringent, school leaders and teachers are searching for more effective professional development opportunities.

The purpose of this study is to examine a job-embedded professional development opportunity focusing on collaborative planning. The literature revealed that attitudes, perceptions, and past experiences can also impact professional development. Joyce and Calhoun (2010) explain that teachers' perceptions and experiences impact them professionally and can also influence professional development. Knight (2009) argues, “How teachers view professional learning in their schools on any given day will

inevitably be shaped by how they have experienced professional learning in the past . . . history can be a major roadblock to implementation” (p. 508). Many educators hold on to negativity from previous bad experiences with professional development. Mertler (2005) argued that traditional professional development sessions were

a gathering of teachers, usually after a long day of teaching or on a jam-packed workshop day, who sit and listen to an expert describe a new methodology, approach, or instructional material that they typically do not believe relates directly to their classroom situations or teaching styles. (p. 15)

This description of professional development resembles what many educators have experienced. These attitudes are not productive and can influence perceptions of future learning experiences.

The ability to positively impact change can suffer when teachers’ beliefs and perceptions associated with professional development conflict with underlying beliefs (Hirsh, 2002). I want to examine the perceptions of both teachers and the principal in an effort to gain insight about the JEPD initiative. As the research indicated, systems are paying much more attention to the importance of quality professional development; however, there is little mentioned as to what teachers view as effective professional learning.

Implementing initiatives such as the JEPD collaborative planning do not monetarily cost districts any money and as the research indicates can positively impact student learning. The first stage of Guskey’s (2002) model for evaluating professional development involves participants’ reactions. He explains that many refer to these measures of participants' reactions as “happiness quotients,” insisting that they reveal

only the entertainment value of an activity, not its quality or worth. But measuring participants' initial satisfaction with the experience can help you improve the design and delivery of programs or activities in valid ways (Guskey, 2002). Receiving feedback from the teachers about the process could potentially help to improve the design and delivery of the job-embedded professional development initiative.

Change Theory

Reform is a constant in education. The topic of educational change is so widespread that when I entered the topic in Google, there were over two billion websites that emerged in less than one second. While change is inevitable it is not always easy. One of my professors once shared the opinion that babies with dirty diapers were the only people who liked change. While this may be an exaggeration, there are many who fear the impact of reform. This fear can be detrimental to the success of initiatives such as professional learning communities.

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009) describe change as stepping into unknown space and disrupting organizational balance. Change creates disequilibrium which can be quite uncomfortable. People must make sense of change themselves. Fullan (2001) stated, "In many organizations, the problem is not the absence of innovations but the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, piecemeal projects with superficial implementation" (p. 109).

Schmoker (2006) suggests that teachers may have been viewed as resisters even if they were merely resistant to initiatives that were haphazardly planned or implemented. Teachers have often been asked to adapt and commit to countless initiatives without

having an understanding as to why they should do so. Fullan et al. (2006) identifies seven core premises that underpin the use of change knowledge. The seven premises include: a focus on motivation; capacity building with a focus on results; learning in context; changing context; a bias for reflective action; tri-level engagement; and persistence and flexibility in staying the course. All of the premises are about accomplishing motivation and engagement. If teachers are resisters, and are unmotivated and disengaged, then school reform will be ineffective.

Fullan et al. (2006) define capacity building as, “any strategy that increases the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning” (p. 9). Most change theories are weak on capacity building which contributes to their failure. Fullan et al. (2006) also explain that effective change requires opportunities for learning in context. There is very little opportunity for teachers to engage in continuous learning about their practice and collaborating with their peers. Fullan et al. (2006) shared examples of change theories which appear to be on the right track one of which is PLCs. However, he critiques PLCs because the theory of action underpinning PLCs is not deeply rooted and understood by all that are choosing to adopt them. People make the mistake of treating PLCs as the latest innovation, when they are actually meant to be, “enduring capacities, not just another program or innovation” (Fullan et al., 2006, p. 6).

Lewin’s Planned Change Theory is also referenced by many hoping to initiate or implement change. The change model he developed in 1947 implied that change has multiple phases, some of which will be smooth while others will be disruptive. His three-step model involved unfreezing the current level, moving to the next level, and re-

freezing or reinforcement at a new level. He believed that change requires creating the perception that change is necessary, then moving toward the new behavior, and finally solidifying the new behavior as the norm. Lewin believed that there must be an understood or felt need for individuals to adopt new behaviors, and that new behaviors must be grounded in the culture of the organization (Burnes, 2001). Both models look at change holistically and acknowledge that behaviors and attitudes must change for positive reform to occur.

Kotter's eight step model is comparable to Lewin's. Both models look at change holistically and acknowledge that behaviors and attitudes must change for positive reform to occur. Kotter's eight steps include: create a sense of urgency, build a guiding coalition, form a strategic vision and initiatives, enlist a volunteer army, enable action by removing barriers, generate short-term wins, sustain acceleration, and institute change (Kotter, 2012). Kotter (2012) explains "the biggest mistake people make when trying to change organizations is to plunge ahead without establishing a high enough sense of urgency in fellow managers and employees" (p. 4). Both Kotter and Lewin's change models stress the importance of stakeholder buy-in. Kotter's model stresses the buy-in and momentum throughout the eight-step process. Motivation and purpose are important aspects of the change process. If people do not understand why they are doing something, then they are less likely to do it with fidelity.

Marzano et al. (2005) believed that there are two levels of change impacting educators. There are first order changes which are extensions of the past that fit into existing paradigms. These changes are like to be accepted because of the common

agreement among stakeholders that change was necessary. Second order changes are new and complex and are met with resistance because they break away from the past. A great deal is required of those leading any change initiative. Marzano et al. (2005) indicate that leaders of first order change must nurture positive relationships and foster a sense of culture through shared beliefs. Marzano et al. (2005) also shared responsibilities necessary to lead effective educational change which include: knowledge of curriculum and instruction; willingness to be the driving force behind the change; commitment to ensuring the stakeholders are aware of most current theories and practices; willingness to challenge the status quo; flexibility; and the ability to communicate effectively.

Fullan (2008) also suggested six secrets for leaders hoping to implement change. His first secret is to love your employees. Building positive relationships is a central component of any successful change initiative (Fullan, 2008). The second secret involves connecting peers with purpose. This idea supports the importance of buy-in and understanding purpose in both Lewin's and Kotter's models. The third secret implies that capacity building prevails which involves building both individual and collective efficacy to accomplish successful change. The fourth secret is learning the work and suggests that more time is needed for teachers to learn by doing rather than attending professional development workshops. The fifth secret is transparency rules and the final secret is that systems learn.

Change initiatives often experience difficulties or rough patches. Fullan's (2002) extensive change research refers to this phase as the implementation dip, which is a dip in performance as stakeholders encounter an innovation that requires new understanding.

Darling-Hammond (1997) reinforces the importance of understanding the inconsistencies of change. She suggested that there will be swells of enthusiasm and undertows of resistance. Leadership is a critical component of implementing change initiatives. While there are numerous theories and an abundance of tips and tricks to help maneuver change, having an effective leader who understands the ebb and flow of change is imperative (Fullan, 2001).

Future Research

There is an abundance of research on professional development and professional learning communities. However, there was not an abundance of research involving the sustainability of professional learning communities. Teacher leadership and attitudes play a significant role in the success of any change initiative in schools. Additional empirical research studies could benefit the sustainability of professional learning communities. Also, there is a lack of research which supports the impact of professional development and its impact on teacher practice and student achievement.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework is designed to illustrate the relationship between the perceptions of individuals and how they can impact change initiatives such as PLCs. PLCs can be an effective form of professional development if certain strategies are in place and they are implemented effectively. Some of the characteristics required to ensure effectiveness of PLCs are listed in this framework and include: culture, leadership, communication and feedback, and shared vision (see Figure 1).

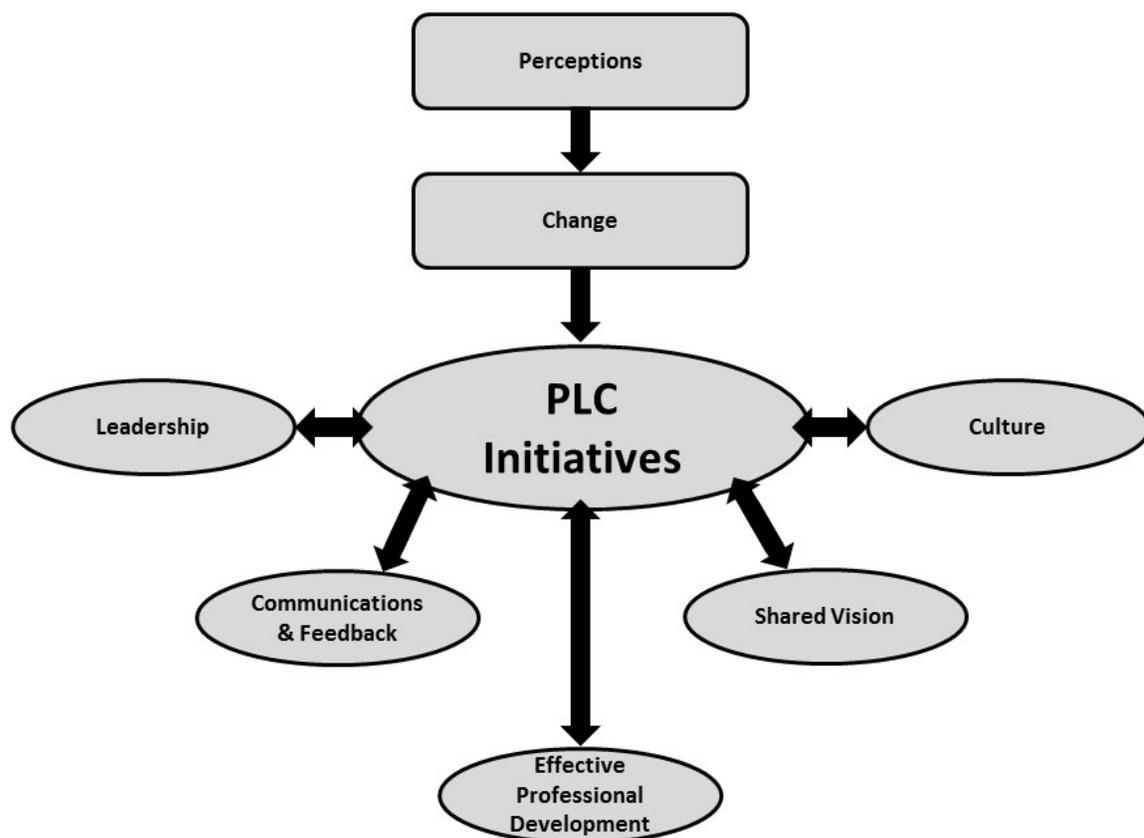


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

An individual's perceptions can impact change or reform initiatives which can sometimes become a barrier to successfully implementing change. Understanding perceptions can help strengthen efforts when instituting reform initiatives. In order for PLCs to be an effective means of professional development, which is a desired outcome, there are several things that must be a priority. Leadership plays a key role in implementing change and creating and sustaining the professional learning within PLCs. Ensuring that there is consistent and ongoing feedback is non-negotiable. Also, DuFour's research indicates the importance of a collaborative culture. Culture is critical to the

success of PLCs. There must also be a shared vision among stakeholders so all involved are aware of the overall purpose as well as their individual roles.

Stoll et al. (2006) share that strong PLCs, “bring together the knowledge, skills and dispositions of teachers in a school or across schools to promote shared learning and improvement” (p. 242). Through my research, I will examine how the components of this conceptual framework impact the effectiveness of professional development initiatives such as collaborative planning PLCs.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Statistical evidence and trend data cannot answer all of the questions about what is taking place in schools. For example, if one wants to know why teachers leave the profession, then discourse and interaction with teachers is critical (Lichtman, 2013). I am intrigued by teachers' attitudes towards professional development; therefore, the purpose of this research study was to examine a job-embedded professional development initiative that focuses on collaborative planning within content specific professional learning communities. The detailed examination also examined the perceptions of the teachers and non-teacher participants.

Research Design

Qualitative research is defined as a method of inquiry that utilizes various methods of data collection in an effort to understand human behavior in natural settings (Lichtman, 2013). According to Lichtman (2013) the main purpose of qualitative research is, "to provide an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience" (p. 17). The purpose of this study was to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon that in this case is a collaborative planning PLC initiative. This study examined a PLC initiative at a North Carolina high school in an attempt to learn more about this form of job-embedded professional development. The study examined the

initiative from the onset looking for changes which may have occurred and also examined the perceptions of the teachers and non-teacher participants. The study was primarily concerned with answering “what,” “why” or “how” questions that are typical of qualitative research. The research questions include:

- What can be learned about professional development from a PLC initiative at a NC high school?
 - What can be learned from the following:
 - The historical context from which the initiative developed
 - The changes that happened and the structures that were created
 - Teachers’ perceptions of the initiative
 - Other involved non-teacher participants’ perceptions
- To what extent do teachers and non-teacher participants feel participation in the collaborative planning PLC initiative has impacted teacher practice?

A qualitative case study was the methodology selected for the study. According to Merriam (1998) a case study is, “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system” (p. 12). Lichtman (2013) defines a case study as a qualitative research approach which focuses on the study of an individual or organization and “involves the specific and detailed study of a case or cases” (p. 91).

Utilizing a single case study approach to examine the perceptions of teachers participating in a job-embedded professional development initiative was the appropriate method for this research because it allowed for the observation of participants in their natural setting. The case study also provided the participants the opportunity to share

their story through semi-structured interviews. Case studies are a preferred approach when, “how or why questions are being posed, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context” (Yin, 2003, p. 1). I wanted to learn about the experience of the participants and according to Stake (1978), case studies proliferate rather than narrow the scope and the best use appears to be for “adding to existing experience and humanistic understanding” (p. 7).

With the goal of learning more about this form of job-embedded professional development and obtaining an in-depth understanding of how teachers perceived the experience, it was necessary to utilize a research design that allowed for observations and interviews. Utilizing multiple sources of data collection allowed for triangulation.

Key Concepts

The study examined concepts of professional development, specifically job-embedded professional development, and collaborative planning. Guskey (2000) defines professional development as the processes, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might in turn improve the learning of students. Job-embedded professional development (JEPD) refers to teacher learning that takes place within the workday and is designed to enhance teachers’ content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Guskey, 2000). The JEPD initiative involves professional learning communities. PLCs are essentially collaborative teams in which members effectively work together to achieve common goals (DuFour et al., 2010). The study examined the concept of collaborative teams working together to plan instruction. A collaborative team is the basic structure of a PLC, which essentially

drives improvement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Within in this study the collaborative teams are comprised of teachers teaching the same course.

Setting

The study took place in a high school which is located in the Sandhills region of North Carolina. Progress High School is the pseudonym used for the school. Progress High School was selected for this study because teachers were participating in a collaborative planning initiative within content-specific PLCs. The school has approximately 1,150 students, 80% of whom are from families in poverty and qualify for free and reduced lunch. The demographic composition of the student population is: approximately 54% African-American, 24% Caucasian, 13% Hispanic, 6% multi-racial, 3% other minority groups, and approximately 25% of the student population receives services within the Exceptional Children's Department. In 2008, this Title I high school was labeled a Turnaround School by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The school was identified because the performance composite was below 60% for two consecutive years and was assigned a transformation coach who helped create a Framework for Action Plan. Beginning in 2009, the school's test scores continued to increase until the adoption of the new Common Core and Essential Standards in 2012.

In 2012-2013, the proficiency dipped to 16.6%. When the school received Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) growth data in October, Progress High School realized it did meet expected growth. A comprehensive needs assessment was conducted by the Secondary Education Department as well as School Support. The

School Support Department consists of an Associate Superintendent and three directors. Each director works with assigned schools and is also responsible for supervision of principals. As the Executive Director of Secondary Education, I work with my department to provide support to schools in the areas of curriculum and instruction. I worked with Progress High School's Director of School Support and their principal to create a plan for support to be implemented for the remainder of 2013-2014 school year. Part of the plan included job-embedded professional learning through structured collaborative planning within professional learning communities.

Teachers teaching the same subject did not have a common planning time during the school day. In an effort to improve student achievement and build teacher capacity, the principal designated Tuesdays as the day for collaborative planning after school. The collaborative planning began in November, 2013, with Math I, Biology, and English II teachers meeting in the media center after school at 3:45 each Tuesday. In addition to my presence, it was expected for the following to routinely attend: school administrators, curriculum specialists, and the Director of School Support. The math, ELA, and science curriculum specialists support the collaborative planning and attend the sessions at least twice each month. I attend the sessions as my schedule allows. In 2013-2014, the school's proficiency increased to 36% and the school achieved growth. However, because of the school's low performance composite, the school system continued to provide intensive support and monitoring.

During the 2014-2015 school year, the teachers continued to plan collaboratively within their PLCs with the support from the central office and school administrators.

Most of the teachers in the three PLCs remained the same. All of the math teachers returned for the 2014-2015 school year. However, the Biology PLC added two new teachers while all three of the ELA teachers were new. The four teachers that did not return either moved or opted to stay home with newborn children. In 2014-2015, the school's proficiency composite decreased by 2%; however, they exceeded growth.

I also have a unique personal interest in Progress High School. My three siblings and I all graduated from the school and I was actually employed there for fourteen years. My mother was employed as the office manager there for nearly 20 years until she retired in June, 2016, and my father was the baseball coach until he died in December, 2013. My husband began serving as the coach after my father's death and my youngest brother was the football coach there for two years. The baseball field was also named for my father in May, 2013. My family has deep roots within the school and community.

Progress High School and its surrounding community has experienced drastic changes since I graduated in 1992. In August, 2000, a new high school opened and some of Progress High School's students were now in the new school's attendance area. Many of the neighborhoods redistricted to the new school district were middle class neighborhoods. Most of the remaining neighborhoods, including the one I grew up in, are older neighborhoods which have large numbers of rental properties. The school demographics have changed drastically over the last two decades, making Progress High School the only Title I high school in the district until the 2016-2017 school year when one other high school received the designation.

Participants

The participants in this study include: the principal, an assistant principal, a formative assessment coach, an exceptional children's teacher, and English II, Math I, and Biology teachers at Progress High School. Other non-teacher participants are district curriculum specialists. Each participant was invited to participate in the study and they were given the opportunity to decline.

The teacher participants all teach a course with an End of Course (EOC) exam and participated in the school's collaborative planning, job-embedded professional development initiative. The three PLCs that were the focus of this study are comprised of the following: three Biology teachers, four English Language Arts teachers, four Math I teachers, and an Exceptional Children's teacher who supports Math I. The teacher participants in this study all have less than fifteen years of experience, ranging from 3 to 14 years. The experience of the non-teacher participants range from 11 to 25 years of experience. Tables 1 and 2 outline the backgrounds of all participants. (Pseudonyms are utilized.) Five of the seven non-teacher participants had been a part of the initiative since inception. Ms. Caldwell came in 2014 and Ms. Landry assumed her role during the 2015-2016 school year.

The three PLCs all have the same structure; however, their composition is unique. Only one of the Biology teachers began the collaborative planning, job-embedded professional development initiative in November, 2013. The other two teachers joined the PLC during the 2015-2016 school year. After the 2013-2014 school year, one of the ELA teachers moved, a second decided not to return to the classroom after having a baby, and

the third was moved to a different grade level. In 2014-2015, four new teachers made up the English II PLC, and they continue to be the only members of the PLC in the 2015-2016 school year. All four of the math teachers in the Math I PLC started participating in the initiative in November, 2013. The information for teacher participants is listed below in Table 1, and the non-teacher participants' information is listed in Table 2.

Table 1

Teacher Participants

Participant (Pseudonym)	# of years in teaching	Years at school	Years in PLC	Subject taught/position
L. Dover	3	3	2	English II
L. Dees	5.5	3	2	English II
S. Elliot	3	2	2	English II
C. Andrews	4	2.5	2	English II
S. Smith	6.5	6.5	3	Biology
L. Higgins	4	4	2	Biology
K. French	3	3	1.5	Biology
J. Collins	6	6	3	Math I
K. Martin	7	6	3	Math I
R. Roberts	14	3	3	Math I
J. Green	5	5	3	Math I
P. Thomas	8	4	2	EC Resource/Math I

Table 2

Non-teacher Participants

Participant	# of years in education	Years at school	Current Position
K. Nelson	22	NA	Secondary School Improvement Coordinator
Y. Price	20	NA	Secondary Math Curriculum Specialist
L. Landry	30	NA	Secondary ELA Curriculum Specialist
S. Grier	21	NA	Secondary Science Curriculum Specialist
L. Caldwell	11	2	Formative Assessment Coach
J. Williams	16	6	Assistant Principal
D. Knight	25.5	7	Principal

Data Collection

The researcher plays a critical role in qualitative case studies. The research process includes: collecting data, observing natural settings, and constructing realities through interpretations (Lichtman, 2013). The steps of data collection involve: “setting the boundaries for the study, collecting information through observations, interviews, documents, and visual materials, and establishing the protocol for recording information” (Creswell, 2002, p. 148) Much of qualitative research depends on what people have to say and the researcher is the primary source of data collection and making sense of what is said (Lichtman, 2013). Understanding the important role I play as the researcher, my data for this qualitative case study was collected using what Creswell (2002) refers to as the three E’s which include: experiencing, enquiring, and examining. Interviews, observations, and document analysis were all utilized.

Interviews

According to Lichtman (2013) interviews are everywhere and they are the primary way qualitative researchers gather data. Lichtman (2013) defines qualitative interviewing as,

A techniques of data collection that ranges from semi-structured to unstructured formats. Interviewing is seen as a conversation in which an informant and a researcher interact so that the informant's thoughts are revealed and interpreted by a researcher. (p. 325)

The purpose of an interview, regardless of the format is to find out what the interviewee thinks or feels about a particular topic or idea (Lichtman, 2013). Individual interviews helped provide understanding of how participants viewed their experiences as a PLC member.

Individual interviewing refers to dialogue or conversation between the researcher and participant. According to Yin (2003),

Interviews are an essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioral events. Well-informed interviewees can provide important insights into such affairs or events. The interviewees also can provide shortcuts to the prior history of such situations, helping you to identify other relevant sources of evidence. (p. 108)

All twelve teacher participants agreed to participate in the study, as well as the principal, assistant principal, formative assessment coach and 4 curriculum specialists. All interviews were scheduled at times convenient for the participants. Each participant was interviewed once and the most of the interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes. There was one outlier teacher participant interview which only lasted about 15 minutes.

Interviewing was a critical component of data collection. Gaining understanding of the participants' perceptions and learning about the initiative was possible because of the individual interviews.

I conducted guided or semi-structured interviews and utilized a general set of questions (see Appendices A and B). A general guide was utilized with all teacher participants and a separate guide was used for non-teacher participants. The semi-structured approach allowed me to vary questions when necessary as the interviews progressed (Lichtman, 2013).

Observations

Conducting observations of planning sessions allowed me to gather information about the complexities and function of each formal group. Observations are defined by Creswell (2002) as a process of "gathering first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site" (p. 199). All observations were conducted during their regularly scheduled PLC collaborative planning time. The Math I PLC met on Tuesdays at 2:15, the Biology PLC met on Wednesdays at 10:15, and the English II teachers met on Thursdays at 8:45. Utilizing observation as a method helped me to develop a holistic understanding of the phenomena that is as objective and accurate as possible given the limitations of the method.

Lichtman (2013) recommends that observations be conducted several times, allocating between 30 minutes and an hour. Each of the six observations took place during their planning periods which are 90 minutes in length. Each observation lasted for approximately 60-75 minutes each, for a total of 6.5 hours. Observations were conducted

before any of the interviews. Conducting two observations of each PLC allowed me to watch the interactions and listen to the conversations among participants. A detailed observation guide was utilized. This allowed me to document what I observed, as well as what I had questions about. As an observer, I took detailed notes at each of the six PLC collaborative planning sessions.

During the observations, I watched how teachers collaborated looking to see if teachers were engaging in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice. An observation protocol to document my work was utilized (see Appendix D). Observing for the duration of the planning sessions over a period of two months provided an adequate amount of observational data. I was not a participant in the collaborative planning; I was only there to learn through observation. Extensive field notes taken during the observations were also utilized during the data analysis process.

Documents

Documentation serves as evidence of what people think, say, and do (Lichtman, 2013). Documents include private or public records such as meeting minutes, newspapers, or journals (Creswell, 2002). They are an unobtrusive way to gather the language and words of the participants (Creswell, 2002, Lichtman, 2013). I examined the collaborative planning logs completed by the teachers since the beginning of the initiative in November, 2013 (see Appendix C). Each PLC is responsible for completing a form that guides their instructional planning. Bowen (2009) asserts that documents help researchers uncover meaning and develop understanding which is why I chose to review them.

I spent numerous hours examining the collaborative planning logs submitted by each of the PLCs. Document analysis allowed me to identify and track changes in practice which occurred throughout the initiative. I looked for evidence of collaboration and conversation about their teaching practice. Reviewing and analyzing the planning logs from the onset of the initiative allowed me to examine how the teachers' attitudes, behaviors, and practices may have changed throughout the process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative researchers are responsible for organizing and making sense of the data. Throughout this study three unique sets of data were collected and analyzed. The data sets include: observations of the PLCs, interviews, and analysis of the collaborative planning logs over a period of two years. I reviewed each data set multiple times. The initial review of the data was to familiarize myself with the data. I wanted to know what the teachers and non-teacher participants were saying about professional development and their participation in this PLC initiative.

Merriam (1998) explains, "Coding is nothing more than assigning some sort of shorthand designation to various aspects of your data so that you can easily retrieve specific pieces of the data" (p. 164). Utilizing coding techniques helped me to organize and make sense of large amounts of data collected. Participants shared similar perspectives concerning effective professional development characteristics, and coding helped me make sense of the data.

Open coding was used for the initial data analysis. I listened to each interview recording multiple times to familiarize myself with the content. During the initial review,

I underlined key words and made notes in the margins. I also read transcripts from the nineteen participant interviews, my observation notes, and the notes from my analysis of the collaborative planning logs numerous times. I began to look for big ideas participants shared about professional development as well as those concerning their experiences and participation in the PLC. During this process codes were created as I worked through each of the research questions. The list of initial codes established included: collaboration, time, competition among teachers, punitive, use of data, purposeful, professional growth, and mindset or buy-in.

Creswell (2002) describes coding as the process of segmenting and labeling text in an effort to form descriptions and themes. After initial codes were developed I reviewed the data again and began looking for commonalities. This second level of coding involved what Lichtman (2013) describes as categorizing. During this process, axial coding was used. Merriam (2009) describes axial coding as the process of relating categories. Axial coding allowed for reflection and development of categories or groupings around the interpretation of the data. Using axial coding, the categories which emerged from each data set were grouped and subcategories were created. All of the data from the interviews, the document analysis, and participant observations were combined and placed within the appropriate category. The data was then reviewed and put with the research question it addressed.

Just as Lichtman (2013) suggests, I analyzed the raw data then developed codes, categories, and finally the thematic concepts or themes. A theme is a central issue or

concept which a researcher identifies based on coding (Lichtman, 2013). The themes will be shared throughout the remaining chapters of this study.

Subjectivity and Positionality

Subjectivity is inevitable and according to Peshkin (1988) it is defined as the quality of an investigator that affects all the results of an investigation or research study. Lichtman (2013) refers to this as reflexivity, or “a bending back of oneself” and defines it as the capacity of a researcher to reflect on his or her values during and after the research. Engaging in self-reflective activities allowed me to actively monitor my subjectivity. I exercised reflexivity by keeping a journal throughout the research process. I knew it was important for me to do as Creswell (1994) suggests and exercise reflexivity through being aware and sensitive to the ways my history and beliefs shaped the study.

Herr and Anderson (2005) stress the importance of positionality in all research and explain that, “your positionality as a researcher means asking the question, ‘Who am I in relation to my participants and my setting’” (p. 37). As the researcher, I disclosed my positionality and subjectivity. I shared that I currently serve as the Executive Director of Secondary Education for the district. Formerly, I have been a classroom teacher, an academy director, an assistant principal, and a high school principal. In my current work, I focus on curriculum and instructional needs in all middle and high schools within the district. My professional experiences, especially those as a principal and currently as Executive Director of Secondary Education have helped me recognize the importance of quality professional learning experiences for teachers. The study allowed me to review

the implications of the collaborative planning, job-embedded professional development initiative as well as the perceptions of the participants.

I facilitated the research and supported the practitioners as I conducted observations and interviews. I also explained to the participants that my interest in the study stems from roles associated with my current position as Executive Director of Secondary Education. In this capacity, I am responsible for a large portion of the professional development teachers receive within the district. My current position is a supervisory in nature. However, I do not serve in an evaluative role of teachers or school administrators. I do not evaluate the practitioners that I worked with in this study.

Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, communicating the purpose of the study to potential participants and allowing the individuals to determine if he/she wishes to participate was imperative. Understanding my positionality and history with the case school, I also kept a reflexive journal throughout the research process to deal with my subjectivity. In an effort to achieve triangulation, interviews, observations, and document analysis were the data collection techniques used in this study. Triangulation is suggested for the purpose of reliability and Lichtman (2013) explains triangulation uses several methods or strategies to gather data in an attempt to achieve validation. A thorough review of the literature was conducted and I was able to ensure trustworthiness through triangulation by conducting observations, interviews, and reviewing necessary documents.

All interviews conducted were recorded and transcribed. Allowing for member checking to ensure credibility of a narrative account was also important. Participants

were given the opportunity to validate or correct my interpretations. I met face to face with participants to discuss my interpretations of what was discussed in the interviews. According to Lichtman (2013) researchers can utilize member checking to verify their interpretations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) view this as the most important step a researcher can take to improve credibility. When conducting the research, I also maintained an audit trail by keeping copies of written transcriptions, recorded interviews, field observation notes, and collaborative planning logs.

Benefits of Research

Case study research offers, “a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 41). Much of the current research on professional development focuses on effectiveness and the research indicates that professional development often lacks effectiveness in terms of positively impacting teacher practice (Wei et al., 2009). According to Guskey, many professional development initiatives fail because they lack focused planning and do not impact instructional practice. Professional learning communities similar to the collaborative planning, job-embedded professional development initiative, provide a structure that enables teachers to collaborate to find solutions to daily problems (Zepeda, 2013). This study provided insight into how teachers perceived their experiences while also allowing the researcher to learn more about the job-embedded professional development initiative. The purpose of professional development is to improve instructional practice with the ultimate goal of improving

student achievement. The study allowed the researcher to examine the changes which occurred throughout the initiative while learning first hand from participant perspectives.

Professional development can play an important role in teacher effectiveness (National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 2003). Therefore, it is important to seek opportunities to improve professional learning. Examining teachers' perceptions concerning the collaborative planning, job-embedded professional development initiative can yield insight for those wanting to learn more about this form of job-embedded professional development. According to Dijksterhuis and van Knippenberg (1998), influential scholars such as Piaget and Kaffka, recognize that perceptions affect attitudes which lead to behaviors. Taking into account the fact there is a correlation among perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, examining perceptions of the participants also offered insights as to how the JEPD collaborative planning initiative may be improved. There is a considerable amount of research surrounding the field of professional development and professional learning communities, but there is not an abundant amount of research which examines teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of professional learning communities such as the JEPD collaborative planning. This study contributes to the existing research.

Limitations of Research

Limitations are restrictions or weaknesses that occur when the design of a study cannot control for all factors (Yin, 2003). Qualitative research in general, is often characterized by small purposive samples selected so that, thick descriptions can be acquired (Merriam, 1998). A limitation of this study is the small number of participants

who were selected from only one school. There were nineteen participants within one school and school district. An additional limitation was what Flyvbjerg (2006) refers to as external validity or generalizability through inquiry. As the researcher, I was transparent so outsiders had enough information to decide whether or not the research is relevant to his/her situation.

Summary

The qualitative case study was the appropriate methodology for the study. Case studies allow for the collection of data in natural settings and attempt to answer “how” or “why” questions. I was able to answer the research questions through examination of the participants’ perceptions of the initiative. These questions were answered through interviews, observations, and document analysis, which are common methods of data collection in case study research.

According to Sparks and Hirsh (2000) districts and schools must build a new model of professional development which embeds professional learning into everything teachers do. They also assert, “Continuous learning must be a part of the daily work of every teacher in America” (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). This study allowed participants the opportunity to share personal experiences with the job-embedded collaborative planning initiative, providing insights and recommendations for future improvements.

The next chapter provides the findings from this study. The findings are triangulated from the following data: participant interviews, observations of the PLC collaborative planning sessions, and analysis of the collaborative planning documents.

CHAPTER IV

DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS: EMERGING THEMES

Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings of the research conducted on the job-embedded collaborative planning PLC initiative at the case high school. The purpose of this study was to examine a high school's collaborative planning PLC initiative in an effort to learn more about this method of job-embedded professional development and gain insight about the effective workings of PLCs in a high school setting. The research questions used to guide this study include:

- What can be learned about professional development from a PLC initiative at a NC high school?
 - What can be learned from the following:
 - The historical context from which the initiative developed
 - The changes that happened and the structures that were created
 - Teachers' perceptions of the initiative
 - Other involved non-teacher participants' perceptions
- To what extent do teachers and non-teacher participants feel participation in the collaborative planning PLC initiative has impacted teacher practice?

In order to answer the research questions, I conducted two observations of each of the three case PLCs. I then conducted nineteen interviews with teachers, administrators,

and district level curriculum specialists. I conducted all observations and interviews from February, 2016, to March, 2016. I also examined the collaborative planning documents that teachers began completing since the onset of the initiative in November, 2013. As the study progressed, themes emerged from the literature review as well as in the data collection. The themes emerged throughout the process of reviewing the data from PLC observations, participant interviews, and document analysis (Appendices A, B, C and D). This chapter describes the themes and outlines the findings.

During the review of the data, I first examined the notes from each of the six PLC observations which took place between February and March. Upon review, I made notes of observed patterns and repeated behaviors. I also identified key concepts mentioned by participants in their individual interviews. Finally, additional themes were created after a review of the collaborative planning logs (Appendix C). This chapter has been organized into five sections. The first four sections address the different subparts of the first guiding research question: *What can be learned about professional development from a PLC initiative at a NC high school?* The first section is based on the themes which emerged from part one of the first guiding question: *What can be learned from the historical context from which the initiative developed?* I named Section One, Historical Context.

Sections Two through Four address the other three subparts to the first guiding research question. Section Two, Changes, addresses the question, *What can be learned from the changes that happened and structures that were created?* I named Section Three, Perceptions of Teacher Participants. This section is based on themes which emerged from the question: *What can be learned from the teachers' perceptions of the*

initiative? Section Four addresses the Non-teacher participants' perceptions and is named Perceptions of Non-Teacher Participants.

The fifth and final section addresses the second guiding research question: *To what extent do teachers and non-teacher participants feel participation in the collaborative planning PLC initiative has impacted teacher practice?* I named Section Five, Shifts in Teacher Practice. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

Historical Context

The focus of this section is on the historical context of the collaborative planning PLC initiative. Progress High School implemented the collaborative planning PLC initiative in November, 2013 after receiving dismal results from the 2012-2013 state standardized assessments. The school's overall proficiency composite on the Math I, English II, and Biology End of Course examinations was 16.6%. To make matters worse, the EVASS data received from the state in November indicated that the school did not meet growth. The district required Progress High School to develop a plan for improvement, and the school's plan centered around the collaborative planning PLC initiative which required Math I, Biology, and English II teachers to meet weekly to collaborate around common assessment data, and with the support of district level curriculum specialists, plan for the upcoming week. School administrators decided to require EOC teachers to participate in the collaborative planning PLC initiative in an effort to support the teachers with the new Common Core and Essential Standards, and hopefully improve student achievement.

Standardized test data from 2012-2013 raised concerns and the school's administration was passionate about supporting teachers as they worked together to raise student achievement. I asked Principal Knight, *What led you to implement the collaborative planning PLC initiative in your school? What were your expectations?*

Principal Knight responded,

I would say the changing of the curriculum, the standards, and the increased rigor. I just felt like it was the best way to get teachers to understand and comprehend the changes in the curriculum. I wanted to put them together and include the experts to help grow them with the curriculum and the data piece. You know we use this terminology, 'data-driven', but I thought the best way to help us examine and learn from the data would be through collaborative planning sessions.

During the 2012-2013 school year math and English Language Arts teachers began teaching the new Common Core Standards. Science teachers began teaching North Carolina's new Essential Standards. The rigorous curriculum was new and required teachers to make shifts in their thinking and practice. This collaborative planning PLC initiative would provide teachers the opportunity to explore the new standards through a collaborative process, which would hopefully help deepen the teachers' understanding of the standards. While Mr. Knight's purpose was professional growth and development of the teacher participants, many of the teachers initially had different opinions as to why the initiative was implemented.

Punitive Accountability

A theme that emerged is the feeling that the initiative was punitive in nature and was designed to hold teachers more accountable. I asked the teacher participants, *did your attitude or opinions change throughout the course of the initiative.* I wanted to

understand their initial thoughts in regard to the collaborative planning PLC initiative and whether or not their opinions had changed over time. Seven of the teacher participants shared that they originally felt as if they were being punished or blamed for the school's poor test scores. Ms. Smith who had been a part of the initiative since inception responded,

I do think in the beginning when this started, it was kind of negative. A lot of people were negative because they felt like they were being blamed for certain things. Honestly, I can't lie. Sometimes I felt that way too, but I tried not to be like that. I try always to be positive. I mean if you've seen my data, I've always, from the beginning, met growth. But it was considered by a lot of people as negative, but I think that has changed.

Ms. Andrews also shared how her attitudes or opinions changed.

I think when I first started I didn't like it. I felt like I was being babsat and had a bad attitude. But definitely I think it has changed because I see a purpose to it now, whereas maybe I didn't see a purpose to it in the beginning. I really struggled with the team planning at the middle school. When I got here I was frustrated, I was kind of mad about having to do this again. But now I see that there is a purpose to it and it can be really effective if everybody is on the same page.

As the initiative progressed attitudes improved but the stigma surrounding the initiative never completely went away. The required planning sessions were moved from after school to during the school day which made the initiative seem less like punishment.

The non-teacher participants also realized that many of the teachers felt as if they were being punished. I asked the non-teacher participants to describe their thoughts and experiences concerning the collaborative planning PLC initiative thus far. Three of the non-teacher participants shared that they felt as if teacher participants initially felt like

this professional development initiative was a punishment rather than a benefit. First of all, the participants did not have a choice as to whether or not they wished to participate. It was mandated. The low test scores and no growth which sparked the creation of the improvement plan also contributed to the negative opinions. Ms. Nelson recalled,

I think in just a small-time lapse, it's grown a lot from the beginning. I think that the when the teachers first came together many saw it as a punishment for teaching an EOC course and they really didn't see the rich opportunities that were available within that collaborative environment.

When asked the same question, Ms. Price explained,

I think initially some of the teachers may have been a little reluctant to participate, just because it was mandated. I think back to one of the teachers asking me do all schools have to do this. If I reflect on myself, I wish I would have told him at the time that all schools should participate in this.

Competition among Colleagues

Another theme that emerged throughout this study of the collaborative planning PLC initiative is the feeling of competitiveness among many of the teacher participants. The consistent conversations around data, which in the beginning was viewed negatively, led to a sense of competitiveness among some of the teacher participants. Seven of the twelve teacher participants interviewed mentioned competitiveness among colleagues as something that had been a roadblock and needed to change. During the 2015-2016 school year, EOC teachers throughout the district were required by the district to administer Standards Mastery Assessments (SMA). Students had to take the assessments after each standard had been taught. In previous years, teacher participants were allowed to create

their own common assessments for use in their classrooms. Data from the SMAs was analyzed weekly during each collaborative planning PLC session. Teachers did not initially feel comfortable with administering the SMAs because they felt as if they were being compared to one another as well as with others across the district. Poor standardized testing data is what led to the implementation of this initiative which is why several of the participants feel as if competition among participants was a concern.

The PLC participants were transparent when analyzing the data. Unfortunately, many of the teacher participants felt as if they were being scrutinized and judged based on their data from the common assessments and now the SMAs. Ms. Martin recalled,

Data is what led us to start planning like this, so naturally people are analyzing each other's scores. Everyone needs to do their part and act like this helps, not that you are better than me.

Ms. Dover also shared similar concerns. She explained, "Some people may feel uncomfortable talking about their data in front of administration and those present in the meetings from central office." She felt as if there was some dishonesty and "jockeying for position" within the PLC because of the presence of those that outrank them. She further asserted that her PLC struggled with competition among members. She reported,

It's difficult trying to find out how to get everybody to see the purposefulness of this rather than viewing it as evaluative. It's simply so you can grow from one another. I think part of it is that we come with SMA scores. Everybody's very cagey about the numbers and it's hard to interpret the data if you view data as a score that reflects you as a teacher and will be used against you.

Her opinions concerning the competitiveness surrounding the initiative stem from the negative influence of Standard Six in the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Model. A teacher's rating on the sixth standard, *Teachers Contribute to the Academic Success of Student*, is determined by a student growth value as calculated by the statewide growth model for educator effectiveness. The End-of-Course assessments provide the student data used to calculate the teacher's growth value. She asserted without the emphasis on state testing data and Standard Six, "The scorekeeping would be pointless and data would be data again."

Ms. Dees also shared, "We need to stay away from my kids did this, or my kids did that. It's not a competition. It's like, I cannot teach this so do you have anything to help." Ms. Andrews also noted that competitiveness was a concern. "I notice that people tend to try and show off or control the conversation to make themselves look better when administration or someone from central office is present." As the initiative matured the competitiveness described by the participants did improve; however, it did not disappear. As the teacher participants became more comfortable in their collaborative planning PLCs, they started building relationships and developing trust which helped ease some of the competitive tendencies.

Changes

This section focuses on structures that were created or changes that happened with the collaborative planning PLC initiative at Progress High School. Changes occurred throughout the duration of the collaborative planning PLC initiative. Both teacher participants and non-teacher participants informally shared feedback and concerns which

drove some of the changes. The biggest change was the time of day in which the collaborative planning took place. Other changes that occurred involved the collaborative planning form and the common assessments.

Time for Planning

A theme which emerged throughout the data collection was time. Teacher participants viewed their time as a sacred commodity, and seven of the twelve teacher participants expressed loss of time as a concern. In November, 2013, when the initiative started teachers were required to meet every Tuesday after school in the media center. A review of the collaborative planning logs indicates that the afterschool meetings typically lasted approximately an hour to an hour and a half. During the 2015-2016 school year, the planning which typically took place after school was moved to the school day. Each PLC was given a common planning time to meet during the day. The PLC meetings no longer took place in the media center, instead PLCs were allowed to meet in classrooms. The formative assessment coach was present for majority of the meetings, but administration no longer participated regularly. Moving the planning time to the school day made it extremely difficult for administrators to attend. The district curriculum specialists came at least once each month when their schedules allowed.

I asked the teachers to *please describe your thoughts about planning during the school day rather than after school*. Seven of the teacher participants indicated that they prefer planning during the school day, four said they did not have a preference, and one teacher prefers planning after school.

Time was a concern for Ms. Higgins who preferred having the collaborative planning during the day. She shared,

Ultimately, I would rather have it during the day. It is a catch 22, because after school you know when that 3:30 bell rings, no matter if you've had a great day or not, your mindset is like, okay, I'm done. But then you're like oh, I have a meeting until 5:30, ugh . . . So, as much as I like my time during the day, I would much rather have it during the day.

Ms. French explained that she preferred meeting during the school day because of the more natural and laid back atmosphere. She also liked meeting in the classrooms rather than in the media center and shared,

I think that helped the flow and communication within the meetings, versus everyone in the library together. Everyone looked tense and grumpy... It seemed more formal after school. You never knew when it was going to end and that affected the mindset of people before they even entered the meeting. They were already disgruntled before they entered the meeting, versus during school. Yeah we're giving up a planning period, but it's a little bit more casual... We know there is an end point.

The one teacher who preferred to meet after school was Ms. Andrews. She explained,

I find it difficult to plan during the school day. I don't know why that is. I do most of my planning at the end of the day or at home in a more relaxed environment. As far as the English II collaborative, I don't know. I kind of liked it at the end of the school day better, only because we got more work done. We worked harder and faster because we wanted to go. Whereas I think things are dragged out a bit during the school day and it doesn't feel like you have as much support. I kind of like sitting in with the math and the science. It just felt like we were all in this together.

Common Assessments

In the 2015-2016 school year, SMAs were required and teachers were no longer responsible for collaborating to make their weekly common assessments. This was a district level mandate. When the collaborative planning initiative began in 2013, teachers spent a portion of each planning session creating a common assessment to assess the upcoming standard. While the teachers adjusted to using the data from the SMAs they felt the common assessments they created as a PLC was much more valuable.

Ms. Smith and Ms. Higgins shared that they would like to go back to creating their own tests. They had gotten used to using their data to drive their instruction, and they felt the common assessments they created were more informative. Mr. Collins liked giving the SMAs but he did share that he would prefer to give them on their own time because he felt as if they are often rushing through the material to give the SMA during the desired window of time. Ms. Dees on the other hand, wants more of the SMAs. She stated, "The access to everything we have from the county, all the tests... Woo! That's amazing. That's just a gift." A major component of the collaborative planning PLC initiative was to utilize data to drive instruction. Replacing the teacher-made common assessments with the district-made SMAs was a major adjustment for most of the teachers.

Collaborative Planning Documentation

At the conclusion of each weekly collaborative planning session, teachers were required to submit their work from the planning session to the principal, the lead assistant principal, and the formative assessment coach. The collaborative planning form they

were asked to utilize originally consisted of five instructional planning steps. (Appendix F) These steps included: *A. Review results from the previous week's common assessment (compare and analyze growth test results). What does the data indicate? B. How does the assessment data impact instruction for the upcoming week? Identify standards and learning goals that need to be revisited and identify remediation strategies that will be used to support struggling students. C. Plan lessons for the upcoming week identifying the following: 1. What are the students going to be doing that is aligned with the identified standards? 2. What will the teacher do that connects the standards? 3. What formative assessment strategies will be embedded in the lessons to monitor student understanding? D. Develop or analyze existing common assessment(s) for the upcoming week. E. Specify how lessons are differentiated for all learners.* Administration made adjustments to the original form because the teachers did not like the form and struggled to complete it initially.

After reviewing planning forms from the beginning of the initiative in 2013, I discovered that the teachers did appear to struggle with the form. I reviewed planning logs for November 26, 2013. When asked to discuss and cite strategies and action steps after reviewing results from the previous week's common assessment and describe what the data indicates, the members of the Biology PLC responded, "reading problems completely, analysis of information given, and test taking skills. The same PLC vaguely responded to, *C. Plan lessons for the upcoming week identifying the following: 1. What are the students going to be doing that is aligned with the identified standards? 2. What will the teacher do that connects the standards? 3. What formative assessment strategies*

will be embedded in the lessons to monitor student understanding? Their response was, “Students will be using Punnett squares to identify genetic disorders. They will also study pedigrees and sex linked traits. Clickers will be used and students will complete genetic disorder project.”

On the same date the math PLC cited their action steps and strategies to address what they learned from analyzing the data. The strategy and action step they listed was the need to pay attention to details and specific terminology such as functions. Their plans consisted of, “Identifying the parts of monomial factoring.” I also examined the notes from the English II PLC on November 26. They were more specific in analyzing their data. The shared, “Questions two and five were the most missed questions. Compunction was not defined well for number two and students most likely struggled with the vocabulary in number five too.” Their plans for the upcoming week were, “Students will practice passage and we will use different vocabulary practices, working on prefixes and suffixes, and tone words.”

I then looked at the planning guides from December 2, 2014. All of the questions on this collaborative planning guide remained the same. When asked to discuss and cite strategies and action steps after reviewing results from the previous week’s common assessment and describe what the data indicates, the group members’ response was,

The data from the common assessment on meiosis was 52% for first period, 58% for second period, and 81% for third period. We had a common assessment on genetics/Biotechnology which indicates that the students have an average foundation in Genetics and Biotechnology. Their scores were a bit lower than our teacher made quiz which was open ended.

They also elaborated on what their upcoming lesson plans would focus on explaining,

We will be addressing 3.2.1 and 3.2.2. by having the students complete a sex-linked trait lab, creating a baby activity, various practice worksheets and embedded clicker questions to evaluate students' content knowledge from the material just learned. The students will take a common assessment on Thursday on 3.2.2. Our common assessment which we created is aligned on standard 3.2.2.

I also reviewed the planning guides on the same date for the English II and Math I PLCs.

Both were much more detailed than the guides submitted on November 26, 2013.

However, there was still no evidence of lesson plans being created during this time.

Prior to the start of the 2015-2016 school year the collaborative planning log was revised by administration. Revisions were made in an effort to simplify the form, making it more user friendly. The new form (Appendix C) only had three sections teachers were required to document. It also had a list of questions to help focus and guide their discussion and planning. For example, the first instructional planning step still asked teachers to review the data from the previous common assessment and discuss what the data indicates. The new form included these questions to help guide the review of the data: *Which skill or standard are you most concerned about for your students? Which items were the most challenging for students and what can you learn about their misunderstandings by looking at the distractors? Does the data indicate student groups that can be created for remediation or other purposes?*

The first semester concluded the end of January; therefore, I chose to review collaborative planning logs from February, 2016 because the PLCs had been using the revised form for approximately 6 months. I wanted to examine how their work was

documented so I chose analyze forms from February, 2016. Upon examination, I discovered that the Biology and English II PLCs never switched to using the revised planning guide. Both groups felt comfortable with the previous form, and administration did not object to their choices. The work outlined in the guides from each of these PLCs looked very similar to the ones from the previous year. However, the Math I PLC chose to use the revised form and their documented work was much more detailed. From their documentation, it appears that there was specific conversation around standards and concerns about their data. For example, Ms. Martin wrote,

Question number ten was a problem and I was very disappointed because my students should all have gotten this right. The y-intercept is one of the easiest things to interpret. I believe students saw y and completely ignored the intercept part because 85% of the ones who missed it guessed 'C.' That would be correct if they were talking about y and not the y-intercept.

There was detailed documentation as to how they would address the concerns in their lessons. Three standards were listed as the focus of their lessons for the upcoming week. Resources from SchoolNet and their district's curriculum site were also included in the plans.

Two observations were also conducted for each of the three PLCs. It appeared that the collaborative planning form (Appendix C) may be something that was completed only because the teachers were made to do so. In fact, in one instance the form detracted from the conversation. When I observed the Math I PLC on February 2, Ms. Martin stopped the conversation at one point to ensure she was capturing their work on the required form. On February 18, the English II PLC members spent the first few minutes

trying to determine whose turn it was to complete the form. It also seemed that some of the planning was done prior to the collaborative session. The conversation finally got to instruction after about 15 minutes was spent discussing the negative opinions surrounding Standard 6 of the North Carolina Educator Effectiveness model. The meeting concluded with Ms. Dees creating a Google document so the group could share ideas about how they could tackle and teach Common Core Standard 3. The form was consistently completed and submitted, but it was a concern for many of the participants.

Each PLC consistently completed and submitted the form to administration weekly. One teacher mentioned that nothing was ever done with the forms once they were turned in, which left the impression that the form was a means of checking up on them, rather than providing feedback on what they submitted. Teachers were compliant and turned the forms in regularly; however, their feedback indicated that completing the form was something they had to do rather than something they viewed as beneficial.

Teachers' Perceptions

Conducting interviews allowed me to gather in-depth, perceptual data from both teacher and non-teacher participants. The interviews with the teachers provided the opportunity to gain insight about their perceptions of the collaborative planning PLC initiative, and professional development as a whole. This section details my findings from the interviews with all 12 teacher participants.

Professional Development: What Is It and What Makes It Effective?

Guskey (2000) defined professional development as, “processes, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might, in turn improve the learning of students” (p. 16).

When it comes to professional development, many participants often question, “Why am I here?” Ende (2016) questions why PD is not more engaging, relevant, and impactful and states,

The sad truth is that there is a lack of agreement in the field about what “good PD” is and what it looks like, leaving many leaders with only a vague idea of how to provide their teachers with PD that will stick and have a lasting positive effect on both teachers and students (p. 1).

Ende (2016) shares, “Like the duck-billed platypus, professional development is often easy to spot but difficult to categorize” (p. 3). I asked each teacher participant to define professional development in their own words. Each of the teacher responses were quite similar. All twelve teacher participants described professional development as an opportunity to improve their skill set and grow as an educator. The common theme that emerged was collaboration. Ms. Andrews’ definition mentioned collaboration stating,

I define professional development as just a way where you can sit down with your peers and really collaborate, bounce ideas off amongst each other and learn things from other skilled teachers in that profession.

Ms. Green defined professional development as, “a collaborative learning experience where you get to learn from not only an instructor, but from other teachers as well, which is great when it is done right.” Mr. Roberts also stressed collaboration and shared,

I view professional development as professionals enhancing their skills and learning from other professionals who may have been there before or they currently are there also. So professional development or learning is the sharing of professional best practices.

Having the opportunity to collaborate during professional development was so important that nine teachers stressed it.

I also specifically asked teacher participants to describe effective professional development. When answering this question, several themes emerged, including choice, purposefulness, and collaboration. Six of the participants shared that they feel as if effective professional development allows for teachers to have a choice in what they learn. Ms. Higgins and Ms. Smith both stressed the importance of choice. Ms. Higgins stated, “I would like to have a menu of sessions that teachers can choose from different topics, definitely not staying in the same room.”

When asked what her ideal professional development initiative would consist of, Ms. Andrews expressed,

Well my idea has always been . . . we’ve kind of been doing it this past year. So where we kind of get to pick where our weaknesses are and address those. You know, choice. I guess choice, being able to choose where we want to go and whether it’s technology, instruction or growth and structure . . . just being able to choose.

Nine of the twelve teachers mentioned collaboration as an important characteristic. Ms. Andrews expressed the importance of collaboration and stated,

Effective PD is really kind of where you are able to talk to your other peers, maybe teachers from other schools that you don’t really ever hear their ideas. That’s a great opportunity to sit down and hear ideas from them and methods of teaching. And I’ve learned a lot. Whereas if you are just talking to your co-workers you kind of know their styles and know what they’re doing, so it’s nice to hear from other teachers.

Ms. French also described effective professional development as an opportunity for collaboration. She shared, “I think for me it would sort of be like a meeting of the minds, sort of like brainstorming”. According to Ms. Higgins, effective professional development should be face-to-face and involve a great deal of conversation. Much of the district level professional development is done through a teleconferencing platform which Ms. Higgins feels makes it difficult to collaborate and exchange ideas.

Purposefulness was another theme which emerged. Eight of the twelve teachers mentioned that effective professional development must be purposeful. Ms. Dover shared that effective professional development must address a need in the classroom. She stated,

I think a lot of times we get, ‘Oh this is a cool website that I saw’, and the whole PD is an afternoon of listing cool websites which is fine. But for a lot of us that’s not necessarily what we need. There’s an age gap where the older teachers who aren’t into technology, or even the younger teachers who aren’t into technology might need that, but what the rest of us might need is some good old-fashioned classroom management or something like that. I think it needs to be responsive to needs expressed by teachers.

This belief is also shared by Mr. Collins who stated,

I think what makes it effective is making it purposeful. A lot of PDs are very generalized and get lost. You can get extremely bored doing a lot of it. But, if you make somebody enjoy it and have an investment in it, I think one gains a lot more out of it. For example, Project Lead was great. It was professional development that brought me back to actually doing math, rather than doing this or that.

The Collaborative Planning PLC Initiative: An Effective Means of Professional Development

Eleven of the twelve teacher participants thought the collaborative planning PLC initiative was an effective form of professional development because of its emphasis on data and opportunity for collaboration. The teachers realize the benefits especially after the growth data for the 2013-2014 school year was released. In 2012-2013, the school did not achieve growth. The 2013-2014 data revealed that the school met expected growth and there was a 19.4 % increase in proficiency. All twelve teachers expressed that they would continue to plan collaboratively even if they were no longer required to do so. Despite the fact that they felt it was an effective form of professional development, the concern about a loss of time continued to surface. Seven of the twelve teacher participants mentioned loss of time as a concern. They still had some concerns about time even after moving it to the day during their planning period.

Ms. French shared her concerns stating,

It makes sense to have the collaborative planning meetings, just to put our goals together or put our ideas together. I think as a school, though, since essentially we're losing a planning period, it would help if we gained something back. I don't know, less game duties? As EOC teachers, a lot is put upon us to meet during our planning periods. Then we also have these duties, and after school duties and duties, on duties, with duties. I don't know. It would be nice to get something back in exchange. Of course, in exchange, we see our student success but you know, it'd be nice to get some time back in exchange for the time we spend.

Ms. Higgins similarly expressed,

I don't necessarily have a problem giving up our planning once a week because it is going to benefit and we are EOC teachers and that sort of stuff, but it would be

nice that maybe I don't have to do six game duties or I don't have a morning and a lunch duty.

Ms. Smith agrees commented that, "It would be nice though, if we didn't have to do some duties." The comments of these teachers indicate that they view their planning periods as their time and feel as if there should be some form of compensation for giving up some of their time.

Ms. Dover feels that the initiative is a valuable use of time when done correctly.

She shared,

Sometimes it's a struggle, but it is a valuable use of time and I think the more that we turn the collaborative planning towards planning, not just comparing scores, the time is going to sort of come back.

Two additional themes that emerged were the importance of having strong, supportive relationships with peers and maintaining a positive mindset. According to Fullan (2008), positive relationships is a central component of any successful change initiative. Eight participants mentioned the importance of relationships and mindset or attitude as an important part of ensuring the success of the initiative. A perceived negative mindset of some of the participants negatively impacted relationships which participants felt at times impacted productivity.

As mentioned in Section I of this chapter, the participants reported a feeling of competitiveness. Ms. Dees explained that the competitiveness had influenced her PLC. She reported, "It makes it very hard to collaborate. It's like the Real Housewives. When you have a department full of women it can be very difficult." She further explained that

personalities of the group members made collaborating difficult and suggested that the number of English II PLC participants be reduced from 4 to 2. Ms. Andrews also shared the same belief that a smaller number of participants could benefit the group dynamics and make planning together easier. She explained that strong personalities and a sense of competitiveness kept the PLC from having the positive relationships necessary to fully be productive.

In the Math I PLC Mr. Roberts explained the success he had with the PLC he participated in when he worked in a middle school. He recalled,

There were 3 math teachers and we planned together and we got along really well. Our relationship was so good that we did some amazing things. So the relationship among teachers teaching the same subject has a lot to do with it.

He went on to further explain that if he could change any one thing about the collaborative planning PLC initiative it would be, “our mindsets...our mindset is not right and that is hindering us a lot. The mindset is not right.” Ms. Martin also responded similarly stating,

I think I would like to change people’s attitudes. I think it takes...everybody has to buy-in to something for it to work. And I’m not saying that the majority of the people aren’t buying in. But when you have some that aren’t it can cause hostility.

Each of the three members of the Biology PLC mentioned that their relationships with each other helped the success of their PLC. Ms. Smith shared that they were all close friends and even socialized outside of school which helped their working relationship. Ms. French explained, “I think you have to have the right chemistry of

people. Period . . . You have to have the right chemistry of people or else it's not going to work.”

Mr. Collins felt as if the collaborative planning initiative had been an effective means of professional development. However, he did have reservations and expressed his feelings stating,

The initiative needs something to make it where it's not, you know, we're not playing the same CD every time. For 3 years, even before SMAs and Common Assessments came out, we did ClassScape and so on. It was the same idea, just like Study Island was before that. And maybe our Collaborative Planning needs new life. I mean the four of us have stared at each other for 4 years straight, looking at the same things. It's kind of like, okay, we know what you're about to say. You know what I'm going to say.

Making ongoing adjustments in an effort to best meet the needs of the participants and achieve the desired outcomes is necessary.

Perceptions of Non-teacher Participants

This section focuses on the viewpoints of the non-teacher participants which include the following: the principal, assistant principal, formative assessment coach, and four district curriculum specialists. Interviews with each of the non-teacher participants provided insight on how they each defined professional development, their descriptions of effective professional development, as well as their perceptions of the collaborative planning PLC initiative.

Professional Development: What Is It and What Makes It Effective?

The non-teacher participants included the principal, lead assistant principal, and formative assessment coach at Progress High School. The other four non-teacher

participants were curriculum specialists whom spend a great deal of time developing, delivering, and facilitating professional development throughout the district. These professionals have a combined 145 years of experience in education. They are no strangers to the idea of professional development. The definitions they shared were similar to those of the teacher participants. All seven described professional development as opportunities that support the learning and growth of people within the profession.

Principal Knight shared,

I believe professional development is anything that you use to draw on the strengths of your staff and personnel to help those that may have weaknesses as well as anything that is implemented to pretty much evolve your staff into moving in the right direction with implementing strategies that you want to see in your classrooms, anything that will basically nurture them professionally as well as socially.

Ms. Williams mentioned collaboration as an important piece of professional development, but she also shared that it should be geared towards student achievement and it needs to have follow-up. Ms. Price's definition stressed the importance of professional development being ongoing, describing it as a "cyclical process."

Each non-teacher participant was also asked to describe effective professional development. The responses were similar to those of the teachers and two of the same themes emerged: collaboration and purposefulness. Unlike the teachers none of the non-teacher participants mentioned choice as a trait of effective professional development. The unique themes that emerged with the non-teacher participants were the importance of reflection and the need for the professional development to be ongoing Ms. Williams shared,

It can't be a sit and get and then it's over. So, I think professional development needs to have relevant meaning to what's going on within the educational environment at that time and there has to be some type of follow-up and measurable goals.

Ms. Caldwell's role required her to be immersed and involved with the collaborative planning within each PLC. Her definition of effective professional development reflects her role. She began her description stating,

Effective professional development, I believe first of all, that everyone has to have an open mind and be on the same page or be on one accord. You can collaborate and bring tons of ideas to the table but if everyone does not have the correct mindset or an open mind and be reflective of themselves then it's not going to work. It's not an individual thing. It involves not only seeking to understand, but also seeking to be understood.

Her role allowed her to experience working with teachers weekly, enabling her to see barriers such as attitudes and negative mindsets.

The curriculum specialists had similar views, stressing the importance of being targeted and purposeful as well as collaborative. Ms. Nelson shared that in order for professional development to be effective, it must be personalized and purposeful. Ms. Price explained,

It must be targeted with either a needs assessment based on observations, or now we survey the teachers asking them what their needs are. Another aspect that I feel makes it effective is if it's ongoing, so not just you go to this one day and whatever you get out of these four hours is it. I think it's something that should be ongoing. I think it should involve collaboration and communication. We should allow teachers to be creative. There should be follow-up and a demonstration of evidence. Then I would even say the last piece should be reflection. Reflecting back on what you learned and demonstrating it in the classroom. So it's not just about the feeling on that day, but did this really impact student learning.

The two common themes among the both teachers and non-teacher participants were collaboration and purposefulness. All seven non-teacher participants mentioned that effective professional development required the opportunity for collaboration. A third theme which emerged with the teachers was choice, while a theme that emerged with the non-teacher participants was reflection. Ms. Price's detailed description of effective professional development mentioned the importance of reflection. Five of the seven non-teacher participants also mentioned the importance of participant reflection. Mr. Grier commented that in order to have effective professional development it was important for people to collaborate and work towards a common goal. He also shared that they should consistently evaluate and reflect on their practice. Ms. Nelson explained,

Just overall it allows teachers the opportunity to grow professionally, but I think a key part in that is the reflection on their own practice and the evaluation of their own practices that kind of propels teachers to grow professionally.

The Collaborative Planning PLC Initiative: Successful or Not

After conducting two separate interviews of each collaborative planning PLC, I began to see both successes and weaknesses of the collaborative planning initiative. I was impressed at how well the teachers appeared to work together. During each of my observations I witnessed the teachers in each PLC having conversations around student data. In one of the Biology planning sessions I observed, the teachers went through each SMA question and discussed why they felt students missed each particular question. For example, when I observed the Biology PLC for the second time they examined SMA questions 1, 2, 3, 6, & 10 discussing possible reasons the majority of the students missed

each question. The teachers also shared strategies for re-engaging students as they prepared to readdress this particular standard. The curriculum specialist was present for the meeting, but the teachers were leading the conversation.

The same was true when I observed the Math and ELA PLCs. The teacher participants analyzed data from the most recent SMAs. During my observation of the Math I PLC on February 9, teachers analyzed each question and commented about the importance of helping students understand math vocabulary. They felt as if the vocabulary in the most recent SMA was confusing for students. The teachers began discussing ways to address this. During my observations of each ELA PLC collaborative planning session, the teachers focused on standards and teaching practice for the majority of the meeting.

Based on what I observed during the six observations, I do feel as if the collaborative planning PLC initiative was successful. When conversations in the planning sessions veered off topic, the formative assessment coach or curriculum specialist was able to refocus the conversation. While I never saw them actually create any lesson plans together as I expected, the groundwork was laid for them to take what they learned and use it when planning their lessons. Based on the information shared in the participant interviews, this is exactly what occurred. The initiative was successful because teachers were working together in teams and engaging in an ongoing cycle of inquiry that promoted professional growth and learning

All seven non-teacher participants were asked to share their thoughts and experiences concerning the collaborative planning PLC initiative. Principal Knight

explained his thoughts concerning the initiative which began in November, 2013, this way,

It was a little like pulling hen's teeth when we first started. We had to literally work on changing the mindset about the way teachers plan and why they did it. We continue to work through a lot of issues administratively, like getting people to attend and play an active role in it. The structure needed to be set to make sense to the teachers. The first year was difficult and the second year was a lot better because we started to relinquish some of the administrative control back to the teachers. Then this year we had looked at the feedback from the previous year and were able to work in the common planning time during the school day. This was a result of their feedback.

Assistant Principal Williams also shared her thoughts this way,

I've seen it grow since we first started when it was kind of just a meeting. And then as we went on, it was a learning experience for all of us and we saw the need for the initiative. Now it's almost just like riding a bike.

The participants at the district level shared similar opinions. According to Ms. Nelson,

I think in a short time lapse, it's grown a lot from the beginning. I think that the teachers when they first came together, many of them saw it as punishment for teaching an EOC course and they really didn't see the rich opportunities that were available within that collaborative environment. I don't think they knew how to use the data to maximize their instruction the way they do now. I would definitely say that it's grown in terms of its practical use to impact instruction.

The non-teacher participants all commented on the growth of the teachers and the initiative overall, but they each also acknowledged that there was still room for more growth and improvement.

Principal Knight along with the six other non-teacher participants felt as if the collaborative planning PLC initiative contributed to the improvement in the school's high

EVAAS growth. They also agreed that collaborative planning initiative had been successful thus far. Mr. Knight shares his opinion about the success of the initiative this way,

I would say that it has been a great success and the data is there to prove it. I think you could take the hard data from EVAAS, the standardized assessment data, and the localized SMA data and see that all of those areas indicate it was beneficial. You could even ask the teachers.

Mr. Grier also explained why he felt the initiative had been successful thus far. He commented,

It's been successful. We've seen the growth with the students, especially on the test score side of things. They're also now, all of them wanting to exceed growth, and I think that's a possibility. I think that it's having a positive impact in that regard. With the activities side of the planning, they are differentiating their instruction. Before they were just, "I'm doing the same thing she's doing." Now they're talking about ways to do things differently for different levels of students.

While all non-teacher participants felt as if the initiative had been successful, several did mention that there were things that still needed to be reflected upon and improved. Ms. Caldwell stated that she felt that the initiative had been successful, but many aspects still needed improvement with the biggest being buy-in and attitude of the teacher participants.

Ms. Price offered her feelings concerning the success of the initiative this way,

I think that it just kind of depends on how we define successful. In terms of bringing about purposeful conversation, it has been a success. In terms of allowing teachers to see the importance behind strength in numbers kind of thing, and the purpose of a team, I'd say success. In a perfect world, my successful definition would probably be every single teacher collaborating and buying into it

and there being equity among all of the members. That would probably be how I define it as far as successful. So not exactly there, but I think that we're getting there and I think that as long as the expectations are kind of set, with the administration in our buildings, and they create that culture of collaboration early on in the school year, I feel like we can get there completely.

The opinions about the experiences surrounding the collaborative planning PLC initiative and its success are similar. All seven non-teacher participants agreed that the initiative had been successful and in their opinion had contributed to the professional growth of the teachers as well as the academic growth of their students. They also agreed that getting them to the point in which it became successful professional development was not easy journey.

Shifts in Teacher Practice

This section includes both teacher and non-teacher participant reflection on shifts in teacher practice. One question asked of the teachers, *Please explain how your teaching practice may or may not have changed as a result of your participation in the collaborative planning initiative*, guides this section, Shifts in Teacher Practice. The other question that guides this section was asked of the non-teacher participants. They were asked, *Please describe any changes in instructional practice you may have witnessed among teacher participants*. This section includes teacher reflection as well as what the non-teacher participants observed.

Teacher Participant Reflections

Only one of the 12 teacher participants stated that her practice had not changed as a result of participation in the collaborative planning PLC initiative. Ms. Thomas explained that her practice is not changing as a result of the collaborative planning. She

shared on several occasions throughout the interview that the collaborative planning PLC did not meet her needs as an exceptional children's teacher. She felt that the initiative was designed to serve content teachers that did not completely understand how to completely bring her into the collaborative conversations. Ms. Dees shared that her practice had not changed as a whole and she stated, "I would still be teaching the same way," but she did feel as if she had changed some. She shared that she had learned a lot throughout the course of the initiative, but it did not completely change her way of teaching. She expressed her love of the SMAs and how valuable they are in planning instruction to reach all levels of students.

The ten remaining teacher participants all agreed that their practice had changed as a result of participation in the collaborative planning PLC initiative. Ms. Andrews explained that the data has definitely changed her instruction. As a new teacher, she was easily frustrated when her students did not grasp the content. Looking at the data with her colleagues helped her focus on what was important. She explained,

The data is showing me, okay, you need to go back and maybe you did teach it but this aspect or this skill was not really grasped. I think that aspect of my teaching has changed. I love the data.

Ms. Elliot's participation in the initiative has resulted in a change in her practice. When asked if her practice had changed she replied,

Certainly. I've been more open and more willing to take risks as far as trying different things in the classroom that I was skeptical about before. I think it has really encouraged me to step outside my comfort zone and use data to deliver the instruction that is best for my students.

Ms. Dover expressed that she was extremely data-driven prior to the collaborative planning but she had learned a lot from her peers. Sharing best practices allowed her to try new things in her classroom. She shared, “I like that we are collaborating, but we are not synchronizing”. Mr. Collins also shared that his practice and how he paces his lessons changed. He attributes much of this to his use of SMAs for data and using shared resources for review. Ms. Smith and Ms. Higgins each asserted that their practice change because of the use of common assessment data. Ms. Smith explained that she is now better able to differentiate and scaffold information because of the conversations around their use of data.

Ms. Martin explained her shift in practice this way,

I think that I couldn't say anything less than it's challenged me to become better. You know, I've gotten a deeper understanding of my standards... We're all open to each other's suggestions. Looking at how someone else teaches something, looking at other's perspectives and how they taught their kids has helped.

Seventy-five percent of the teacher participants emphasized how utilizing data had changed and improved their practice. Using data consistently helped teachers address student deficiencies with standards. And in the opinion of both teacher and non-teacher participants, this use of data within the collaborative planning initiative helped raise student achievement in their school. One hundred percent of the participants felt as if the initiative had a positive impact on the school's student growth. The school exceeded growth in both the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years.

Non-teacher Participant Reflections

The principal, assistant principal, formative assessment coach, and district level curriculum specialists all felt as if there had been shifts in teacher practice. Principal Knight explained that his observations indicated that teachers were doing a better job staying on pace and they were utilizing similar instructional strategies. According to Mr. Knight a huge shift was the increased knowledge around the curriculum. He shared, “It helped teachers comprehend a very complex curriculum. It helped them break down the standards and really understand them. It also help them chunk and plan activities for the ninety minute block.” Ms. Williams who spent time as the school’s formative assessment coach before becoming an assistant principal also saw the benefit of using the data from SMAs to reteach and re-engage students in their learning. Ms. Caldwell, the formative assessment coach was consistently present and hands-on when working with the teachers in the collaborative planning PLCs. She described the shift this way,

I can especially speak to this with my math teachers. One in particular is blowing my mind this semester. She’s always been receptive to whatever I’ve said. However, this semester she’s been pulling the resources from SchoolNet and she’s been implementing activities in her classroom. It’s no longer just the sit and get environment when you go into her classroom. Basically what Ms. Price had been talking about, let them show you before you show them. So many math teachers think that, ‘I have to show you first, now you regurgitate.’ It’s really impressive to go in her classroom and see that going forward. My biology teachers they’re awesome. They’ve implemented test-taking strategies which is something I used to do in my classroom. The English teachers, they are more receptive to their EC population.

The curriculum specialists also witnessed shifts in teachers’ practice. Ms. Landry, mentioned the improved use of data to inform instruction as well as utilization of brain

based learning strategies among the ELA teachers. She also expressed that they were using a common instructional language with indicated a better understanding of the standards. Mr. Grier saw Biology teachers increased emphasis on the use of data to plan and differentiate instruction. Ms. Nelson also witnessed a shift in the ways the teachers looked at data. She stated, “I’ve seen the shift from looking at the data from a whole perspective to looking at data for the purposes of individualized instruction.” Ms. Price also mentioned that the math teachers were now better at using data which made their lesson planning both purposeful and intentional. She further described the shift this way,

I have noticed that teachers are more willing to let go of a little bit of that control in the classroom and make their lessons more student-centered, because they know they are not in it alone. That is a big change in their instructional practices.

Ms. Price also shared Ms. Caldwell’s opinion about the tremendous shift in instructional practices by one particular math teacher. She began using student tasks and investigations rather than delivering content through the practice of I do, we do, you do.

Observed Changes in Practice

During my observations of each PLC, I noticed the emphasis on data when planning instruction. The members of each of the collaborative planning PLCs acknowledged they made changes in their instructional practice. In each of my observations of the Biology collaborative planning PLCs, I saw teachers analyzing SMA data and discussing both standards and recommended instructional strategies.

During both of my observations of the ELA collaborative planning PLC, teachers were having rich discussions about the standards which led to discussions about how to

best teach the standards. Student SMA data was also discussed. During my first observation, they discussed the benefits of small group instruction and decided they would attend a professional development opportunity before they tried to implement the learning stations. Throughout my second observation two weeks later, they were planning for small group instruction. The teachers had already attended professional development supporting small group instruction. During this collaborative planning session, they planned the skills which would be reviewed in each station. The interviews with the ELA teachers indicated that they had changed and become much more data-driven and willing to take risks as a result of the collaborative planning PLC initiative. I definitely saw evidence of this in my observations.

In my observations of the Math I PLC, I noticed that Ms. Martin was a leader within the PLC. She led the much of the conversation in each of the planning sessions. On February 2, the group discussed the SMA data from the standard which was assessed the previous week and Ms. Martin pulled instructional materials from SchoolNet that she thought would help the group with remediation. Mr. Collins shared that they needed to be mindful of the bridge standards that students were expected to master in eighth grade. The group also began to discuss how to teach the upcoming standard and Ms. Martin shared an investigation or mathematical task that she planned to use with her students. During my observation Ms. Martin acknowledged to the group,

I never felt comfortable letting students struggle through their learning. Ms. Price has shared the importance of this with us over and over and I did not want to give in at first. I know I talk about tasks a lot, but I can really see a difference with my kids. I have always just given them what they need to know, instead of letting them take control of their own thinking and learning. Now that I better understand

my standards, I see that these tasks are necessary and beneficial. I am not trying to push these on you, but I really believe in them.

Throughout each observation teachers were sharing best practices and seemed to have a willingness to try new things.

Using data to individualize and personalize instruction was the common shift in practice that each of the non-teacher participants witnessed. Their instruction became more personalized and student-centered as a result of their use of common assessment data which helped gauge where their students were. The other common theme was the improved familiarity of content standards. All seven non-teacher participants agreed that the discussions around content helped teachers develop a better understanding of their standards which in turn improved their instructional practice.

Summarizing Thoughts

This chapter has presented the data of this study on professional learning within identified PLCs. The data collected in this study provide the reader with a look at the perceptions and practices of both teachers and administrators. These participants found the collaborative planning initiative to be an effective means of professional development because it allowed them to collaborate and was purposeful. While all twelve teachers agreed that the initiative was successful and they would continue to plan collaboratively even if the initiative ended, they did express concerns over loss of time and the competitive mindset of some participants.

Each of the non-teacher participants also viewed the initiative as successful and shared what they had learned through their participation. Support and accountability are

important; however, what is equally important is the ability to guide the collaboration so teachers can get to the point where they are leading the collaboration and reflecting continuously on their practice. Implications for the school are to ensure that time is allocated for the collaboration to continue, and to ensure consistent support and guidance is provided.

Chapter V provides an analysis of these findings. Additionally, the final chapter summarizes the study and provides implications for further inquiry as well as conclusions.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

Research has consistently revealed that the student achievement depends heavily on teacher quality and effectiveness (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Guskey, 2000). The importance of quality professional development to improve teacher capacity has been magnified because teacher quality is viewed as the most important factor in student achievement within a school (Hightower et al., 2011). Teachers impact student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Sparks, Hirsch, 2000), and according to Guskey (2003), professional learning is a powerful way to help build teacher capacity and raise student achievement.

This study examined the collaborative planning PLC initiative at a comprehensive high school in North Carolina. The goal of my study was to learn more about professional development, specifically this method of job-embedded professional development and gain insight about the effective workings of PLCs in a high school setting. In my current professional role as a central office administrator, I work with a team of professionals to provide quality professional development opportunities, including support of PLCs. An abundance of schools have PLCs in theory, but how they are utilized and supported is inconsistent. Educational reform requires hard work. The concept of PLCs is a powerful educational reform model which requires, “more than adopting new mission statements,

launching strategic plans, or flying banners claiming ‘we are a learning community’” (DuFour et al., 2005, p. 10). I have seen schools bounce from initiative to initiative while attempting to support teachers and ultimately raise student achievement. I strongly believe that researching what works and does not work in initiatives like the job-embedded collaborative planning PLCs will be valuable for schools looking for ways to support teachers and improve achievement.

In an effort to gain a more genuine understanding of professional development, specifically the job-embedded collaborative PLC initiative, I conducted a qualitative case study of the collaborative planning PLCs at a North Carolina high school. I collected data through recorded interviews of 19 participants including: 12 teachers, 1 principal, 1 assistant principal, 1 school level formative assessment coach, and 4 curriculum specialists. I also observed each of the PLCs twice, for a total of 6 observations. Finally, I collected and reviewed the collaborative planning documents (Appendix C) that teachers were required to submit weekly. I found that job-embedded professional development initiatives such as the collaborative planning PLCs can be a successful initiative to support and improve teacher practice when implemented strategically. In this final chapter I will share conclusions as well as implications and recommendations based on what I have learned through my research of the job-embedded collaborative planning PLC initiative at Progress High School.

Research Questions

This chapter will seek to answer the guiding research questions utilizing the data that was collected and shared in Chapter IV. The guiding research questions that were answered include:

- What can be learned about professional development from a PLC initiative at a NC high school?
 - What can be learned from the following:
 - The historical context from which the initiative developed
 - The changes that happened and the structures that were created
 - Teachers' perceptions of the initiative
 - Other involved non-teacher participants' perceptions
- To what extent do teachers and non-teacher participants feel participation in the collaborative planning PLC initiative has impacted teacher practice?

What Can Be Learned about Professional Development from a PLC Initiative at a NC High School?

The data collected throughout the course of this research indicated the collaborative planning PLC initiative can be an effective form of professional development. There are several conditions that must be in place in order for productive professional learning to occur. Both the literature review and the data collected in this research study indicated the following impact professional development:

- Collaboration is a critical component of professional development especially PLCs. The powerful collaboration that is characteristic of professional

learning communities involves a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice which can positively impact student achievement (DuFour, 2004). JEPD opportunities such as PLCs can be effective professional development if implemented and supported effectively (Wei et al., 2009). The teacher participants in this study stressed the importance of collaboration in professional learning. The collaborative planning PLCs provided teachers the opportunity to gather and engage in ongoing conversations or “cycles of questions that promote deep team learning” (DuFour, 2004, p. 6). The interviews with the participants made it clear that collaboration was a valued characteristic of effective professional development.

- Quality leadership providing consistent support from implementation throughout the duration of the planning is paramount. Stoll et al. (2006) stress the importance of leadership in the effectiveness and sustainability of PLCs. Principal Knight was receptive to feedback and made adjustments to ensure the collaborative planning PLCs improved and sustained. Having an effective leader who understands the ebb and flow of change is imperative (Fullan, 2001). The interviews with teachers indicated the importance of ongoing administrative support. Teacher participants also wanted leadership to work alongside them in a supportive capacity rather than simply monitoring their work.

- Planning and preparation prior to implementation is important. Participants should help develop the initiative, expressing their needs and offering input on design. According to Guskey and Yoon (2009), no improvement effort has ever succeeded in the absence of thoughtfully planned and well implemented professional development. Thoughtful planning which allows for the development of a shared vision is essential when implementing change initiatives. Morrissey (2000) shared the significance of time and intentional planning. The planning for the collaborative planning PLCs was intentional; however, administration did not have enough time to plan prior to implementation. In my interviews with teachers, I discovered that the purpose of the initiative was not clear for all teachers. Teacher's initially lacked buy-in because the collaborative planning PLCs were implemented quickly which left no time for stakeholder input.
- Allocating or dedicating time for learning is one of the most critical conditions to the success of professional development. As Couros (2015) shared, "As leaders, if we ask teachers to use their own time to do anything what we're really telling them is: it's not important" (p. 5). The teachers resented having to stay after school to participate in the collaborative planning PLC. Several teachers mentioned that they felt as if they were "giving up their time" to participate. When the planning was moved to during the school day teachers became less resistant and attitudes towards the initiative improved.

- Attitudes and relationships can play a significant role in the success of professional development. According to Joyce and Calhoun (2010), teachers' perceptions and experiences impact them professionally and can also influence professional development. The ability to positively impact change can suffer when teachers' beliefs and perceptions associated with professional development conflict with underlying beliefs (Hirsh, 2002). Because of the context behind the initiative, teachers had to work on building the trust necessary to foster effective, collaborative relationships. Participants understood that attitudes influenced productivity, and when asked what they would like to change about the initiative, several mentioned the attitudes of some of the participants. The participants of the Biology PLC even attributed much of their success as a PLC to their relationships.

Attitudes Shaped by the Historical Context of the Initiative

When implementing professional development opportunities such as the collaborative planning PLC initiative, it is imperative for all participants to have buy-in as well as a shared vision. The historical context in which the collaborative planning PLC initiative was implemented impacted the professional learning. The study uncovered that the initiative was quickly implemented after receiving low achievement data from the previous school year which quite possibly made the requirement to participate seem punitive and even helped create a competitive feeling among some participants. There was extreme urgency to improve student growth and achievement. The 2012-2013 EVAAS growth data was received in October, 2013, and the initiative was implemented

only one month later. This left little time for teachers and administrators to collaboratively develop the initiative.

The data from the interviews with the teacher participants shared in Chapter IV indicated that it would have been beneficial to allow teachers to have a role in planning the initiative. Stoll et al. (2006) suggests that effective professional learning communities fully exhibit eight key characteristics the first of which is shared values and vision. PLC participants must have a shared vision and need to help develop their own protocols and norms. Anne Smith, assistant superintendent of Long Island's Mattituck-Cutchogue School District, began by facilitating everything herself. She wanted her teachers to know that they were not being judged and explained, "You need to teach them how to ask questions that don't put people on the defensive" (Ullman, 2009, para.1). There was an unhealthy sense of competitiveness among the majority of the teachers in the collaborative planning PLCs which stemmed from their beliefs that they were being blamed for low test scores. Ms. Williams, the assistant principal, witnessed this competitiveness recalling,

Mr. Knight used to say that there is nothing wrong with a little bit of friendly competition. So there may be some friendly competition, but sometimes, I think that some of our teachers may go a little bit overboard. Even these teachers are getting better about this.

Administration was not comparing teacher data, but the history behind the implementation led teachers to believe that they were. The school immediately began this initiative in response to data and teachers did not have input in developing the initiative.

The collaborative planning PLC initiative initially lacked a shared vision among participants which could have improved teacher buy-in.

Lewin believed that there must be an understood need for individuals to adopt new behaviors (Burnes, 2001). Both Lewin and Kotter's change models look at change holistically and acknowledge that both attitudes and behaviors must change for positive reform to occur. The teacher participants' attitudes toward the collaborative planning PLC initiative gradually changed from the beginning when it was first implemented.

The improvement in the attitudes of the teacher participants can be attributed to the following: the planning being moved to during the school day rather than after school and the satisfaction stemming from improved student achievement. Teacher participants valued their time and appreciated not having to stay after school to plan. Attitudes also began to improve when the teachers were able to see the improvement in test data and student growth at the end of the first year of planning in 2013-2014.

Ms. French, described her attitude change this way,

Initially, I was like, 'Do I really want to teach Biology? You are always meeting with people. You always look grumpy and you don't look happy. Do I want to be a part of this?' I think once I started and had to go the meetings it was not so bad. Actually, I think adding the extra component of being more casual in meetings... I think that helped the flow and the communication within the meetings, versus everyone in the library together. It seemed more formal after school and you never knew when it was going to end. I think it kind of affected the mindset of people before they even entered the meeting. They were already disgruntled before they even started. Everyone used to be tense and grumpy. Now being together everyone is much more chill about it, and we are discussing important information.

Altering the master schedule to ensure the teachers had time to plan during the school day contributed to the improved attitudes among the teacher participants that Ms. French described. Mr. Grier, the science curriculum specialist recalled,

They've gone from compliant to active participants and there's more of an expectation now of what is going to be accomplished when they meet. It's no longer a negative thing, primarily because it's now being done during their planning time. I think part of the negative pull was the fact that it used to be after school. I've seen now with it during the day that they actually collaborate more, and that's going to have a positive impact.

Teachers appreciated being heard. Administrators listened to their concerns about time, and ensured that the teachers would have common planning time during the day beginning in 2015-2016 school year. This change helped ease the tensions surrounding the mandated collaborative planning initiative and contributed to increased productivity among teacher participants.

Another factor that contributed to increased productivity and decreased negativity among participants was the improved student achievement and growth. In 2013-2014, the school met expected growth and in 2014- 2015, the school exceeded expected growth. Teacher participants believed their work within the collaborative planning sessions helped achieve these results which lessened the negativity and helped productivity. Mr. Knight summed up the changes in attitudes this way,

Well it's like anything else, once you see the good in, and they were able to actually see the results and the fruits of their labor, and started feeling better about themselves. They realized that it was their collaborative work that helped them all make the growth they were not making before.

The collaborative PLC initiative was viewed by teacher participants as something as they had to do because administration was reacting to low test scores. Principal Knight shared that he implemented the collaborative planning PLC initiative because of increased rigor of the new curriculum standards, but participants did not initially view this as the reason for participation. According to Guskey and Yoon (2009), “Educators at all levels need just-in-time, job-embedded assistance as they struggle to adapt new curricula and new instructional practices to their unique classroom contexts” (p. 498). Administration shared this purpose with the teacher participants prior to the implementation, but the timing of the initiative caused the majority of the teacher participants to initially feel as if it was punishment rather than an attempt to support their professional learning. When the planning was moved to during the school day and the teachers began to witness the fruits of their labors, there was a shift in attitudes which helped to ease the negativity surrounding the initiative while improving productivity. Timing and careful implementation is critical to the success of professional development initiatives.

Leadership is Key

Leaders play an important role in the success of professional development opportunities such as the collaborative planning PLC initiative. Administration is largely responsible for practically every facet from implementation to execution and sustainability. Throughout the course of the collaborative planning PLC initiative, teacher participants shared feedback and concerns. As a result of administrative observations and teacher feedback, several changes occurred. The most significant change was moving the

collaborative planning from after school to the common planning periods teachers shared during the school day.

Senge et al. (2000) note there are two key components of systemic change in the school setting. They are 1) to involve a principal who believes in the potential of a learning organization, and 2) have the skills to build a community of collaborative learners. Principal Knight believed in the potential and had the skills to build the community of learners. He listened to the various concerns of the teachers throughout the initiative and made adjustments accordingly. Being responsive to the needs and concerns of the teachers helped prevent some of the concerns such as time from being barriers to success. Leadership is a key to the success of professional development initiatives like the collaborative planning PLC.

Time for Planning

It is also important to dedicate enough time for learning communities to meet and work through their issues regularly. One of the critical conditions for the success of PLCs is designated and protected time for teachers to meet and collaborate during the regular school day (Many, 2009). Many (2009) also shared that researchers like Schlecty observed the importance of time nearly thirty years ago stating,

The one commodity teachers and administrators say they do not have enough of, even more than money, is time: time to teach, time to converse, time to think, time to plan, time to talk, even time to go to the restroom or have a cup of coffee. Time is indeed precious in school. (p. 9)

The interviews with the teacher participants indicated that they shared concerns about lack of time. Initially the planning required teachers to stay after school on

Tuesdays to plan for the upcoming week. This was not favorable for teacher participants, many of whom had both personal and professional obligations after school. This contributed to negative attitudes about the initiative. Beginning with the 2015-2016 school year, the teachers were no longer required to stay after school to plan collaboratively. The principal ensured that the teachers had common planning time during the school day. Moving the planning to the school day demonstrated his responsiveness to the teachers' concerns, as well as his commitment to the success of the collaborative planning initiative. When Principal Knight manipulated the school's master schedule to ensure the teachers had common time during the day for planning, teachers' attitudes towards the initiative started to improve. We are never going to find more time, so if schools want to ensure that teachers work in teams, leaders have to make time for collaboration.

Collaboration, Not Competition

One of DuFour's three big ideas which encompass the core principles of professional learning communities is a culture of collaboration (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). When describing effective professional development, the teachers stressed the importance of collaboration. Effective professional development connects content and pedagogy and allows for professional collaboration (Sparks & Hirsh, 2000). Despite some of the negative attitudes surrounding the mandated collaborative planning initiative, the teacher participants all saw the value of collaboration and declared that they would continue to find ways to collaborate even if the initiative ended and it was no longer a requirement.

The seven non-teacher participants unanimously cited collaboration as an important trait of effective professional development and they felt having sacred time to collaborate should be a priority. Additionally, the non-teacher participants also understood the need for support when collaborating. Anne Smith, Superintendent of the Matituck-Cutchoogue School District shared,

It's up to the school leader to establish trust. The formal and informal leaders have to be clear that the goal is collaboration and not competition. You can't clobber people about test scores and then say, 'Let's collaborate.' What are you doing to support the teacher? (Ullman, 2009, para. 1).

In this study the principal secured the support of curriculum specialists from the district to support the teachers' professional growth. According to Pirtle and Tobia (2014),

Teachers benefit from assistance from those who can bring specific expertise to PLCs, such as how to analyze data, unpack standards, identify the most effective instructional strategies to address a standard, identify effective assessment strategies, use student work as a reflective tool in PLCs, and adjust instruction to meet student needs. This critical support can come from principals, instructional specialists, curriculum specialists, and anyone else who can provide technical assistance.

The teachers appreciated the interactions with the curriculum specialists; however, initially they felt as if the purpose of their presence was monitoring rather than support. Because of the historical context of the initiative, it took longer for the teachers to develop trusting relationships with each other and those supporting the initiative such as the curriculum specialists. Grier, the science curriculum specialist, commented about the importance of trust stating, "These teachers now trust each other and I think they trust me. This is big."

Initially there was a tremendous lack of trust among participants, in large part because teachers felt as if they were being compared to one another. As the initiative progressed and the school's performance data improved, teachers began to feel less pressure and let go of some of the anxiety associated with the collaborative planning. Tensions eased as the teacher participants better understood their roles and purpose of the initiative, but some degree of competitiveness and apprehension still existed. It is imperative for leaders wishing to implement reform initiatives such as the collaborative planning PLC to remember the planning stage prior to implementation is critical to participant buy-in and the sustainability of the initiative.

Research indicates that teachers' perceptions and experiences can influence professional development (Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). Teachers' views of professional learning in their schools is shaped by their past professional learning experiences which can definitely be a barrier when implementing professional learning opportunities (Knight, 2009). Examining participants' perceptions provided insight into their experiences within and feelings toward the job-embedded professional development opportunity. Initially the majority of the teacher participants and the principal did not have a shared vision, or understanding as to why the initiative was implemented. Teacher participants shared that purposefulness was a trait of effective professional development; however, initially they did not view participation in the collaborative planning PLC initiative as an opportunity for professional growth. The historical context behind the initiative shaped attitudes and perceptions and teacher participants struggled to get past the historical context which led to the implementation of the collaborative planning.

To What Extent Do the Teachers and Non-teacher Participants Feel Participation in the Collaborative Planning PLC Initiative Has Impacted Teacher Practice?

Strong collaboration prepares teachers to face key challenges such as rigorous curriculum, utilizing data, and differentiation. Professional development is not effective unless it causes teachers to improve their instruction. According to Mizell (2010) “Professional development provides ongoing opportunities for educators to continue to improve their knowledge and skills so they can help students achieve. When educators learn, students learn more” (p. 19). Data collected from both observations and participant interviews indicated that the initiative did positively impact teacher practice.

Data shared in Chapter IV indicated that there was a shift in teachers’ practice. All but one teacher participant felt as if their practice had changed and improved to some degree as a result of participation in the collaborative planning PLC initiative. The non-teacher participants witnessed the change in the teachers’ practice in classroom observations. This shift in practice can be attributed to the consistent and data-focused conversations about curriculum standards and instructional strategies. The support received from the curriculum specialists also contributed to the improvement in practice. The teachers were not just told to “Go plan.” The administration ensured they had ongoing support. The greatest impact came from the following changes in practice: better use of data to drive instruction, implementing effective differentiation strategies to personalize student instruction, a stronger understanding of curriculum standards, and a willingness to implement new strategies, or even take risks because of things learned from their peers.

Data-driven

The interviews with teacher participants indicated that there were some reservations and even resentment about the collaborative planning PLC initiative initially. The fact that teacher participants felt test scores sparked the initiative also contributed to a sense of competitiveness among teachers. Ms. Martin commented, “Data is what led us to start planning like this, so naturally people are analyzing each other’s scores”. Despite strong, initial reservations about looking closely at data, all the participants, teachers and non-teachers, felt as if the biggest change involved their productive use of data to identify student strengths and weaknesses and adjust instruction accordingly.

The biggest shift in practice among teacher participants was the improved use of data to plan instruction. I witnessed the intense focus on data during each of my observations. The collaborative planning PLCs looked at common assessment data weekly. The district required Math I, Biology, and English II teachers to administer SMAs. Participants learned to look at the data from the SMAs as a guide for what each student needs to learn in order to master the content standards. Learning to really analyze the data was a process that did not happen overnight, and at times was uncomfortable. As mentioned previously, egos periodically got in the way; however, the PLCs were productive in spite of the competitive egos. Despite reservations about data being punitive and used to compare teacher performance, teacher participants acknowledged how powerful analyzing the data was.

Nine of the teacher participants expressed that they felt as if the collaborative planning initiative had helped them better use data to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. According to Mizell (2010),

In a learning team, teachers and school leaders work together to use data to understand what students are not learning and to find instructional gaps, then determine what they need to learn to help close those gaps. Learning team members next set out to learn what they need to know and do to improve. (p. 11)

The non-teacher participants all agreed that teachers had drastically improved in working together as a learning team with their emphasis on desegregating data and planning instruction. Ms. Nelson explained,

I actually think that the collaborative planning was a vital part of what helped the school grow in terms of student achievement. I think analyzing the data and focusing on individual student needs and trying to personalize the education, helped move the school forward. I think this collaborative planning PLC has pushed the teachers to do that.

The data from the weekly common assessments was used to plan lessons for a diverse population of learners. Effectively analyzing the data helped the participants focus their planning efforts as well as improve their teaching practice. The teachers did change their practice and all agreed that this change in practice helped contribute to the positive changes in student achievement. The school did not meet expected growth in 2012-2013. After implementing the collaborative planning PLC initiative, the school met expected growth in 2013-2014 and exceeded expected growth in 2014-2015.

The teacher participants became intentional about utilizing data and differentiation strategies to meet students where they were in their learning. Mr. Grier shared,

I think that the collaborative planning is having a positive impact on student growth. Teachers are now differentiating instruction. Before they were just, 'I'm doing the same thing she's doing.' Now they are talking about ways of how to do things differently for different levels of students.

When planning and delivering instruction, differentiation became a focused priority for the teachers. As Ms. Price indicated,

Thanks to the collaborative planning teachers are willing to let go of a little bit of that control in the classroom and make their lessons more student-centered. They know that they are not in this alone.

The emphasis on utilization of data, particularly SMA data helped teachers develop differentiated and student-centered lessons, personalizing instruction for students. This was one of the primary purposes for implementing the collaborative planning PLCs.

Deeper Understanding of Curriculum

A reason for implementing the collaborative planning PLCs was the complexity of curriculum standards. After conducting interviews with the teacher and non-teacher participants and observing the collaborative planning in each PLC, it was evident that the teachers were deepening their understanding of content standards. They were also sharing instructional strategies and ideas with one another during their weekly planning sessions. Principal Knight attributed the collaborative planning initiative for the school's improved data. He shared,

The collaborative planning has been a great success and the data is there to prove it. You can take the hard data from EVAAS, standardized assessments and the local data from SMAs and see the benefits. These improvements came as a result of the hard work of dedicated teachers who really became experts in their curriculum and using data to support student learning.

In the ELA collaborative planning PLC, teachers shared that they were more willing to try new things because of the collaborative planning. Teachers became more confident and comfortable with the ELA standards, and this confidence carried over into classroom instruction. Ms. Elliot shared,

I have been more open and willing to take risks as far as trying different things in the classroom that I was skeptical about before. I think the collaborative planning has really encouraged me to step outside of my comfort zone and helped me deliver the instruction that is best for students.

Ms. Andrews explained that the collaborative planning had helped her be more reflective.

She expressed,

I tried a project-based learning idea that we've talked about in our planning. I just want to try it because I have been so anti that. I try to think of myself as a student and I never learned that way. This has helped me look at data and step out and realize that other students learn differently than I do. Some of my co-workers have had success so I wanted to try it... We did a slam poetry competition project last semester and they loved it. I had kids coming in from other classes asking if they could come and sit in on the presentations. It was really cool.

Teacher participants in each of the collaborative planning PLCs benefited from collaborating and learning from one another and their students ultimately reaped the benefits of their teachers' learning.

Ms. Martin expressed that the support that accompanied the collaborative planning helped her gain a deeper understanding of her content standards. She explained that her peers as well as Ms. Price, the math curriculum specialist, helped her delve into the standards she was once somewhat uncomfortable with. In my interview with Ms. Caldwell, the school's formative assessment coach, she specifically acknowledged the shift in Ms. Martin's practice stating,

One teacher, she's blowing my mind this semester. Ms. Martin's always been receptive to whatever I've said; however, this semester she's been pulling resources from SchoolNet and implementing student-centered activities and investigations within her classroom. It's no longer just the sit and get environment when you go in her classroom. Basically, she's doing what Ms. Price has been talking about, let them show you before you show them. It's really impressive to go in her classroom and see that going forward.

Other members of the Math I PLC were beginning to experiment and try some of the student tasks shared by Ms. Martin. Ms. Green was especially receptive and began making the same shift. Ms. Green shared that she had learned a great deal from her peers which definitely impacted her practice. She explained how what she learned impacted her practice stating, "I actually take a lot of ideas from the other teachers. I try to do more of what they are doing when the data says that it works." Ms. Price described the shift in practice she witnessed among Math I teachers this way,

First of all, I think just having these collaborative sessions allows teachers to have powerful conversations around the content, around the things that they're doing, the things that work, the things that don't work. If I think about pockets of collaborative PLCs where the teachers are transparent and they are willing to say when something doesn't work and willing to go to their peers and say, 'Hey, this didn't work for me. I'm looking at your data and it looks like it worked for you. Please tell me what you did.' I have seen a lot more of this because of this PLC

initiative, and I think those pieces, have helped shift teachers' instructional practice.

Ms. French shared that her practice had changed because of what she was learning from her peers. She described herself as "being a good thief." She explained,

Yes, I think my teaching practice has changed and improved because I can look to two teachers with more experience and say, 'Okay, what's better? And then I can kind of incorporate that into my own teaching style with my students.

She also explained that the constant conversation within the collaborative planning helped her become more familiar with the standards. Ms. Smith agreed that she felt as if she was better differentiating instruction and scaffolding information. As relationships developed among PLC members their productivity as a PLC improved. Mr. Grier, the science curriculum specialist, shared that there was a strong bond among the members and they cared about the success of each other's students. When supportive conditions such as this are present, teacher practice can change and improve.

Willingness to Take Risks and Try New Things

The teacher participants in each of the three collaborative planning PLCs did experience a significant change in practice. Having a genuine understanding of curriculum standards is paramount. When teachers truly understand the curriculum, they can better plan and deliver aligned, student-centered, effective instruction. This deeper understanding can also help teachers develop greater confidence which encourages them to take risks and try new things.

Ms. Price, the math curriculum specialist shared that she observed the math teachers relinquishing some control in the classroom and planning more student-centered lessons. She shared that the math teachers began utilizing student tasks and investigations rather than delivering content through the practice of I do, we do, you do. The lesson plans being developed by the math teachers during the collaborative planning reflect their desire to include build opportunities for productive struggle. The tasks and investigations referenced by Ms. Martin allowed for authentic student engagement, exploration, and problem-solving while building perseverance. Prior to the collaborative planning initiative, teachers were reluctant to shift their instructional practice.

During one of my observations of the English II PLC, I noticed an apparent shift in practice. During this particular planning session, the teachers discussed using stations to teach a particular standard. They divided up the responsibilities for the upcoming lesson based on their personal strengths. For example, Ms. Anderson, facilitated a station using poetry, while Ms. Dover used informational text. Prior to planning this lesson, the teachers asked the ELA curriculum specialist to provide additional support with small group instruction so they could utilize this practice in their classrooms. The teachers referenced that they had attended a session with Ms. Landry and teachers from one other high school in the district the previous week. The ELA teachers were committed to trying new teaching strategies in an effort to benefit all students.

It is imperative to support teacher learning and professional development, especially in initiatives such as the collaborative planning PLCs. The participation from the curriculum specialists ensured teachers had the ongoing support necessary to improve

their instructional practice. Leaders must ensure that the conditions and climate for learning are in place. Once the trusting relationships were established and attitudes began to improve, the teacher participants' instructional practice started to transform.

DuFour's three big ideas which encompass the core principles of professional learning communities are: ensuring that students learn, a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Over time each of the three collaborative planning PLCs improved their practice as a collaborative team. Despite reservations or negative attitudes concerning the collaborative planning, teachers developed an intense focus on results and they were using data to ensure that their students learned, and this was a tremendous shift in practice.

Barriers and Challenges

As the data indicated in Chapter IV, Progress High School experienced successes throughout the course of their collaborative planning PLC initiative. Eleven of the teacher participants felt as if the initiative had been successful and all of the non-teacher participants felt as if the initiative had been successful thus far. While the participants agreed the initiative was an effective form of professional development and had been successful, it was not implemented without challenges. Initially there was resistance to the initiative because overall there was a sense of resentment among teachers. There was very little planning on the front end of implementation which meant teachers had little input in the initial development of the initiative which resulted in lack of buy-in and shared vision.

The majority of the teachers initially felt as if their participation was punishment for the school's poor test scores. As the initiative progressed and the teacher participants began seeing student growth in their classrooms and schoolwide, they did not question the purpose of the initiative as they once did. Had they not had positive results initially, the initiative could have failed because there was not a strong, shared vision among participants.

Time can also be a barrier to the success of initiatives such as this. Many teacher participants shared negative opinions about the initiative because of the required time commitment. Once the administration responded to the concerns and moved the initiative to the school day during planning periods there was much less resistance. While there was still a sense of negativity among some teachers because of lost time, it was much better than when the planning took place after school. Seeking feedback and being responsive to the needs of participants is important.

Recommendations for High School Principals

The goal of this qualitative case study was to learn about teacher professional development through examination of a collaborative planning PLC initiative implemented at the case school. From the in-depth review of the literature, as well as the observations, interviews, and document analysis, the following conclusions and recommendations can be for high school principals who wish to implement job-embedded professional learning opportunities. While these recommendations are for high school principals, I do believe they will work for other levels of schooling as well. The recommendations made from my findings include:

- Collaboration is a valued characteristic of effective professional development. According to Kruse (2009) collaboration cannot be coerced nor compelled. Instead, school leaders must help cultivate a sense of pride and ownership in their work. In order to cultivate this collaborative school culture, one must communicate a clear and intense focus on results. It is important for individuals to understand their role and trust that their peers and administration will support them. Relationships are key to cultivating a collaborative school culture. When there is a collaborative culture in place, with strong collegial relationships at the core, then competitiveness among peers should diminish or at the very least improve.
- Maintaining positive, trusting relationships among peers helps the success of PLCs. According to Couros (2015), innovation will never happen in education if we do not first focus on relationships. Relationships are the most important thing in any organization, so how we connect with others, and build culture, should always be first and foremost. It is important to empower teachers and give them the opportunity to assume leadership roles within PLCs and throughout the school. Let teachers know they are valued and trusted. Acknowledge failure as an opportunity for growth, and celebrate successes. Teachers cannot fear potential repercussions for mistakes. Risk-taking must be an expected norm. Covey (2009) shared 13 traits of high-trust leaders which include: talk straight, demonstrate respect, create transparency, right wrongs, show loyalty, deliver results, get better, confront reality, clarify expectations,

practice accountability, listen first, keep commitments, and extend trust. These traits are powerful tips for any leader trying to improve their school culture and build trusting relationships with their teachers.

- When implemented effectively PLCs can be an effective form of professional development for teachers. Having a shared vision and understanding the purpose of one's work is paramount. When developing a vision, involve teachers in the process. This involvement will help move people from compliance and engagement to empowerment (Couros, 2015). People are more willing to collaborate on work that has personal meaning and significance. Educate participants about the expectations and purpose of the initiative. Be transparent and remember, "Clarity precedes competence" (Schmoker, 2004, p. 85).
- Administrative support and leadership are essential to the success of PLC initiatives. Consistent communication among teachers and administrators is necessary. Listening and responding to participant feedback is important to the success of PLC initiatives. It is important to truly give thought to what support consists of, or looks like. Make sure that teachers feel as if they are being supported rather than simply being monitored for accountability purposes. Work alongside your teachers and learn with them. Express through your actions, that professional growth is a priority for all. Keep in mind that structures and procedures can get in the way of the success of PLC initiatives. Leaders must be open to change and make adaptations when necessary. Also,

support may need to be differentiated depending on the needs of the PLC. A one size fits all approach is not what is best. For example, some groups may benefit from utilizing documents such as the collaborative planning guide, while it may impede others. Recognize the needs of your respective PLCs and provide support and implement structures accordingly.

- Time is critical. PLC initiatives such as the Progress High School collaborative planning initiative are most successful when time for collaboration is allocated. Also, PLC initiatives are not quick fixes. Productive PLCs do not just happen overnight; they take time to mature and develop. In order to achieve positive improvements in student achievement like the school in this study, the process must extend over time. As transiency impacts teacher membership in PLCs, new members require initial support so they understand the significance and purpose of participation.

According to Ende (2016),

All of us, no matter what role we hold, no matter what organization we work for, no matter what profession we belong to, need to strive to keep getting better. And getting better requires lots of work-work that we often don't yet know how to do on our own. (p. 3)

This study revealed that job-embedded professional learning opportunities such as the collaborative planning PLC initiative can be an effective means of professional development and can positively impact teacher practice.

School leaders who have implemented or wish to implement similar initiatives can benefit from this research by understanding their supporting role throughout the

initiative as well as their role in development and implementation. Reflecting on the implementation of the collaborative planning PLC initiative brought to mind the African Proverb, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.” Having a strong foundation is critical to reform initiatives like this. It is important to remember this is indeed educational reform, and reform can be challenging. Do not rush into change initiatives. Having a sense of urgency is great, but do not allow the urgency to undermine the importance of establishing a purposeful and shared vision which can serve as a solid foundation for change.

Leaders need to understand the importance of creating and maintaining a collaborative culture in the building. Teacher buy-in is critical to the success of initiatives such as this. If the culture is conducive to collaboration, then there is a greater chance of teachers embracing the opportunity for professional growth. Leaders also need to understand the importance of listening to teachers and being responsive to their needs when necessary. PLC initiatives are something that administrative leaders should participate in with their teachers and consistent support is necessary.

Teachers participating in similar PLC initiatives can benefit from this research by understanding that participation can be a valuable form of professional development. They can benefit from learning about the struggles of these teacher participants and develop an understanding of steps they can take as PLC participants to ensure their participation yields an optimal learning experience.

Future Research

As job-embedded professional development continues to develop it is important that qualitative data continue to be collected to support the positive impact on teacher practice and professional growth. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection can also reveal the impact of PLC initiatives on student achievement. The research surrounding PLCs has demonstrated that when implemented effectively, this form of job-embedded professional development can and has positively impacted teacher practice.

Additionally, this research study raised some questions that would support additional research on this topic. Questions raised by this study include:

- How does professional development such as the collaborative planning PLC initiative impact teacher morale? School culture?
- Are the improvements in the school's student achievement a result of improved teacher practice which was impacted by the participation in the collaborative planning PLC?
- How does transiency among participants, both teachers and leadership, impact sustainability and the effectiveness of professional development initiatives, particularly PLCs?

Conclusion

It's Tuesday afternoon at 3:30. It's been an amazing day teaching science to your eighth-grade students. Great work has taken place, and you have a million and one things to do in order to get ready for tomorrow. However, there's a faculty meeting (which would be fine, except for the fact that according to the agenda, it looks like a "sit 'n get" session led by an expert speaking on a topic with little relation to middle school, let alone middle school science), and you're feeling pretty mind-wiped at the end of the day. But you know you have to go, so you

give up what you want to do and attend. As you sit there trying to absorb the information being shared, you ask yourself the often present question, “Why am I here?” (Ende, 2016)

This dismal picture sounds all too familiar. Sadly enough, much of the professional development being provided in schools is generic, impersonal and forgettable. In order to improve student learning, an effective teacher must be leading the classroom.

Professional development is implemented in an effort to ensure that educators continue to strengthen their practice. The most effective professional development engages teams of teachers to focus on the needs of their students. In collaborative teams, teachers learn and problem solve together in order to improve the achievement of all students. The collaborative planning PLCs at Progress High School provided teachers the opportunity to strengthen their practice as they collaborated with peers.

As educational practitioners, we must be committed to professional development if we hope to improve student learning and ultimately student achievement. As Mizell (2010) stated,

In education, research has shown that teaching quality and school leadership are the most important factors in raising student achievement. For teachers and school and district leaders to be as effective as possible, they continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices. Educators learn to help students learn at the highest levels. (p. 2)

Initiatives such as the collaborative planning PLCs in this study can be an effective means of professional development. Participants in this study overwhelmingly agreed that collaboration is imperative in order for professional development to be effective.

This is especially true for PLCs.

As indicated in the review of the literature as well as in the data collection, leadership is paramount. Leaders must ensure all conditions for learning are in place, as well provide ongoing support throughout the process. One extremely important role of leadership is allocating time to ensure teachers have the opportunity to look deeper at student data and discuss possible strategies to reach all students is a must when trying to plan for effective professional development that allows for collaboration. PLCs have a better chance at success when there is ample time during the day for individuals to collaborate.

However, simply providing time is not enough to ensure success of professional development initiatives. Another important piece is the mindset of the participant. Teacher buy-in is critical to the success of most school reform efforts and the collaborative planning PLC initiative was no different. Attitudes play a key role in the success of professional development. Participants need to feel empowered and have a sense of ownership in their professional learning. Allowing teachers to have a role in planning and developing the initiative, as well as providing them the opportunity to share ongoing feedback is crucial.

By sharing the perceptions and experiences of teachers and administrators involved in the collaborative planning PLC initiative, this study provides valuable insights into this form of job-embedded professional development. As Ende (2016) shared,

The sad truth is that there is a lack of agreement about what “good PD” is and what it looks like, leaving many leaders with only a vague idea of how to provide

their teachers with PD that will stick and have a lasting positive effect on both teachers and students. (p. 1)

This study paints a picture of what teacher participants and non-teacher participants perceive as effective professional development and provides insight into potential impediments when implementing PLC initiatives.

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APPENDIX A
TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What subject(s) do you teach?
2. How many years have you been in education? How many years at this school?
3. How do you define professional development?
4. How would you describe effective professional development?
5. If you were to create a professional development initiative, what would it look like or consist of?
6. Please describe what you may have learned through participation in the collaborative planning initiative.
7. Do you believe the collaborative planning PLC initiative is an effective means of professional development? Why or why not?
8. Did your attitude or opinions change throughout the course of the initiative?
9. Please describe your thoughts about planning during the school day rather than after school.
10. Please explain how your teaching practice may or may not have changed as a result of your participation in the collaborative planning initiative.
11. Do you feel as if the collaborative planning PLC initiative contributed to your school's improvement in student growth?
12. Talk to me about the support you did or did not receive from central services.
13. If you could change one thing about the collaborative planning experience what would you change? Why?
14. If the initiative ended and you were no longer expected to plan collaboratively, do you think you would continue to collaborate with you peers when planning lessons? Why or Why not?

APPENDIX B**NON-TEACHER PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW GUIDE**

1. Please describe your professional experiences.
2. How do you define professional development?
3. How would you describe effective professional development?
4. Principal only- What led you to implement the collaborative planning PLC initiative in your school? What were your expectations?
5. Describe your thoughts and experiences concerning the collaborative planning PLC initiative thus far.
6. Describe your role in supporting the collaborative planning initiative.
7. Please describe any changes in instructional practice you may have witnessed among teacher participants.
8. As the collaborative planning initiative progressed, please describe changes in teachers' behavior you may or may not have witnessed in the sessions.
9. Do you feel as if the collaborative planning initiative has been successful? What activities do you feel made the initiative successful or unsuccessful?
10. Do you feel as if the collaborative planning PLC initiative contributed to the teachers' and schools improvement in student growth?
11. Please describe what you may have learned through participation in collaborative planning PLC initiative. What if any changes did you make throughout the process?

APPENDIX C

REVISED COLLABORATIVE PLANNING GUIDE

REVISED COLLABORATIVE PLANNING GUIDE

Subject: _____

Date: _____

Members Present: _____

Members Absent: _____

Instructional Task Planning Steps:

A. Review results from the previous week's common assessment. What does the data indicate? Use the questions below as a guide for reviewing your data.

- Which skill or standard are you most concerned about for your students?
- Which items were the most challenging for students and what can you learn about their misunderstandings by looking at the distractors?
- Does the data indicate student groups that can be created for remediation or other purposes?

B. According to the assessment data, what standard/concept will require reteaching/reengagement? How will you do this in your classroom?

- Identify specific standards and learning goals that need to be revisited.
- Identify specific remediation strategies that will be used.
- Identify specific students in need of targeted support and plans for providing this support.

C. Using our district Pacing Guide and aligned resources, plan lessons for the upcoming week identifying the following:

- What are the students going to be doing that is aligned to the identified standards?
- What will the teacher do that connects to the standards?
- How will your lesson support student-centered learning?

***Questions for Administration?**

Task	Discussion/Strategy/Action Step	Person(s) Responsible (if applicable)
A		
B		
C		

APPENDIX D

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Location _____ Date _____

Time _____

WHAT I OBSERVED	NOTES: WHAT I WONDERED ABOUT (Questions I may have)	REFLECTIONS
<p><u>Descriptive Notes:</u></p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p>Visual Layout:</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 60px; margin-top: 5px;"></div> </div> <div style="width: 45%;"> <p>Participants:</p> </div> </div> <p><u>“Look Fors”</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration- How does it look? • Is there an ongoing cycle of questions? • Are teachers engaging in frequent, continuous, and increasingly concrete and precise talk about teaching practice? • Are teachers working together as they pose and solve problems, and testing their discoveries? 		

APPENDIX E

STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Standards for Professional Learning
<p><u>Learning Communities</u> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.</p>
<p><u>Leadership</u> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.</p>
<p><u>Resources</u> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.</p>
<p><u>Data</u> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.</p>
<p><u>Learning Designs</u> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.</p>
<p><u>Implementation</u> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long term change.</p>
<p><u>Outcomes</u> Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.</p>

Information retrieved from:

https://learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning#.V8g_ilsrKUK

APPENDIX F**ORIGINAL COLLABORATIVE PLANNING GUIDE****Collaborative Planning Guide
2015-2016****Subject:** English II **Date:** 03/03/16**Members Present:** [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]**Members Absent:** N/A**Instructional Task Planning Steps:**

A. Review results from the previous week's common assessment (compare and analyze growth test results). What does the data indicate?

B. How does the assessment data impact instruction for the upcoming week? Identify standards and learning goals that need to be revisited and identify remediation strategies that will be used to support struggling students.

C. Plan lessons the upcoming week identifying the following:

What are the students going to be doing that is aligned to the identified standards?

What will the teacher do that connects to the standards?

What formative assessment strategies will be embedded in the lessons to monitor student understanding?

D. Develop or analyze existing common assessment(s) for the upcoming week.

E. Specify how the lessons are differentiated for all learners.

Questions for Administration?

Task	Discussion/Strategy/Action Step	Person(s) Responsible (if applicable)	Time Period of lessons
A	Common assessment data shows growth of RL/RI.9-10.2 based on the questions that were fair with work needed on test-taking skills. The students were given a practice RI.3 assessment to compare to the SMA RL/RI.3 standard scheduled for Monday 03/07	All English II teachers	01/29-03/04
B	For the upcoming week, we will continue to spiral back to RL/RI.9-10.1 & 2 but also continue teaching RL/RI.9-10.3 and introduce RL/RI.9-10.4 since those are the basis for the next SMA. We will also work on teaching test-taking skills.	All English II teachers	01/29-03/04
C	This week the students struggled with identifying text structures. Mini assessments were given but not graded to discuss the wording of questions and confirm students' understanding of what the question is asking. Informational text and literary text were used to introduce and review various text structures. Next week, students will be reading informational and literary texts to introduce RL/RI.9-10.4 and using documentaries and commercials to help teach structure and argumentation to address RL/RI.9-10.3. We will also introduce rhetoric via lessons on ethos, pathos, logos. Next week we will incorporate our team teaching and center-based instruction. We will use the Tang Dynasty poems Formative assessment will be based on an examination of students' annotations, their Smashbook pages, their RACE responses, their discussion input, their exit tickets, presentations, and their results on the upcoming SMA.	All English II teachers	01/29-03/04
D	We will be administering the county-wide SMA RL/RI.3 and compare it to the base teacher-made assessment to check for growth.	All English II teachers	01/29-03/04
E	We're providing a variety of graphic organizers, adapted texts from the textbook's adapted reader for struggling readers and ELLs, opportunities for written and verbal checks for understanding, presenting key information in a variety of media, and shortening/chunking written or complex assignments. We're also integrating methods of demonstrating mastery that integrate visuals for students with limited language.	All English II teachers	01/29-03/04