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The Principal's Role In The Implementation Of Professional Learning Communities: From Compliance To Change

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THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:
FROM COMPLIANCE TO CHANGE

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THE PRINCIPAL'S ROLE IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES:
FROM COMPLIANCE TO CHANGE

by

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DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my baby girls who have been by my side watching me each step of the way. There is nothing you cannot do, be brave, courageous, and work hard. The sky is the limit.

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ABSTRACT

Campus administrators have the responsibility to be both building managers and instructional leaders ensuring they are improving instructional practices and student achievement. Learning how these specific tasks can be accomplished while maintaining all their other campus responsibilities is critical to the success of aspiring administrators. This work can and has been accomplished through the implementation of weekly professional learning communities (PLC) with administrators playing an active role in these meetings. Through interviews, observations, and a focus group discussion this study seeks to better understand the role of the administrator in the implementation and process of professional learning communities. This research seeks to understand the administrators' beliefs, actions, and decisions with the intent to support aspiring administrators seeking to make a difference in their communities for both teacher and students through PLCs.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Education collaborative communities are created with the goal to improve practice and productivity (Woodland, 2016). Specific to a K-12 school setting, principals practice collaboration through shared leadership in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) to lead instructional reform, improve teaching and learning, and transform instructional practices (Wilhelm, 2013). Moreover, research suggests that administrators who support the development of PLCs focused on collaboration have a greater impact on student achievement (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Christiansen, & Robey, 2015; Morrissey, 2000; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, & Dutton, 2012; Servais, Derrington, & Sanders, 2009). However, what is less formally studied in the literature is how administrators carefully balance the process of instructional reform and state accountability in a shared leadership setting that supports the development of cultures of collaboration within PLC groups. As such, it is the goal of this project to explore the decisions and actions of principals as transformational leaders who support the development of cultures of collaboration within PLC groups to impact teaching and learning.

1.1 Background and Significance

A cohesive school culture needs a shared vision, mission, values, and norms focused on student learning (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Wilhelm, 2010). This requires teamwork from varying stakeholders to clarify, coordinate, and communicate a clear mission and vision for a campus and community (Marks & Printy, 2003). With these shared foundations all teachers, support personnel, and administrators can work together responsibly with a sense of ownership (Christiansen & Robey, 2015; Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004) to develop shared goals, including instructional approaches that impact student learning.

Unified PLCs is one key component to support such reculturing of schools into cooperative organizations focused on student learning and supporting instructional improvement (Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). This cultural change requires collaboration through collective action and continuous organizational learning to improve student outcomes (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Thompson et al., 2004). The teacher, instructional support team, and administration must be disciplined and committed to the collaborative PLC process where development and knowledge are continuous and shared by the entire school to create results. These collaborative practices require collective and reflective dialogue and critical reflection regarding day-to-day practices related to curriculum, instruction, and student development (Meijlof, 2018; Senge et al., 2012; Wilhelm, 2010).

Equally important effective PLCs have administrative support throughout development and implementation, establish teacher buy-in, and facilitate instructional reform (Willis, 2016). As such, the role of the principal is a careful balance between providing support and pressure for teachers to create beneficial PLCs (Morrissey, 2000). PLC groups formed solely through compliance with administrative directives are unsuccessful (Talbert, 2010), often because administrators fail to use the opportunity for transformational and shared leadership that can support instructional change and student achievement (Wilhelm, 2013). To better understand how principals have been successful at this transformational leadership approach and balancing act requires a more in-depth study of their roles, decisions, and actions.

Principals who establish cultures of high academic achievement and build shared values in a trusting environment (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016) reflect an integrated model of shared and transformational leadership (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Marks & Printy, 2003; Thompson, Gregg & Niska, 2004). According to this leadership approach, the principal is the "lead teacher

and lead learner, and steward of the learning process" (Senge, 2000, p.15). Principals can do this by sharing authority, facilitating instruction, building trusting relationships, supporting data-informed decisions, and recognizing teachers as classroom experts (Vescio et al., 2008; Woodland, 2016) and equal partners in creating change. In the context of PLCs, principals practice collaboration through the integration of shared and transformational leadership to improve teaching and learning (Wilhelm, 2013). More specifically, research finds that well-developed PLCs have clear relationships between PLC practices, shared leadership, and student learning that positively impacts teaching practices and student achievement (Vescio et al., 2008). This research suggests that teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators working in the PLC setting consistently collaborate to identify instructional practices that need to be changed to improve student learning (Servais et al., 2009). Furthermore, results-oriented PLCs collect data to measure the outcomes and substantiate improved student learning. PLC groups then become student-centered focused on instructional changes to promote inquiry and to meet students' needs for content mastery (Wilhelm, 2010).

In sum, research finds that teacher collaboration in PLCs where there is shared and transformational leadership on the part of the administration can serve as a predictor for student achievement (Woodland, 2016). These collaborative PLC settings support goal setting, facilitate teacher growth, and require all stakeholders to address instruction and learning (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Marks & Printy, 2003). At the same time, even though the collaborative PLC is a setting for shared decision making, dispersed leadership, staff empowerment, and collaboration, these practices can only occur with the support, attention, energy, and effort from school leaders (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016). Moreover, even though the research supports the development of these types of PLCs there is

minimal research regarding the principal's role, decision making, and actions in PLCs and the alignment on the part of the principal from these meetings into the instructional setting.

As such, it is the goal of this project to explore the decisions and actions of a principal who supports the development of cultures of collaboration within PLC groups to impact teaching and learning.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The role of the K-12 principal has transitioned from that of the building manager alone to that of the building manager and instructional leader (Alvoid, 2014). Applying a transformational leadership approach implementing the PLC process principals can create a school culture focused on improved instructional practices that support student achievement. Implementing effective PLCs, in turn, builds organizational capacity by developing organizational learning, collaboration, and systems thinking (DuFour & DuFour, 2013). DuFour and DuFour's (2013), *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* clearly states the steps for PLC implementation, the teacher's roles and responsibilities, and findings of effective PLC implementation.

Although there is extensive literature on PLC practices there is a gap in the literature specifically addressing the leadership style and approach administrators implement to develop cultures of collaboration and systems thinking within PLC groups. With the evolving instructional leadership role of administrators, it is critical to understand the administrator's beliefs, approaches, actions, and decisions when implementing PLCs without this information it is difficult to understand how an administrator can be most effective with PLC implementation and practices.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the decisions and actions of a principal serving at a high school in the southwest with a high number of Hispanic students who supports the development of cultures of collaboration within PLC groups to impact teaching and learning. This project seeks to acquire a deeper insight into the beliefs and disposition of this administrator who is developing effective and impactful PLCs at this school.

1.4 Research questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: As an administrator what beliefs and approaches are most beneficial to support PLC implementation?

Research Question 2: What are the actions and decisions of administrators, who support the development of cultures of collaboration, improved instructional practices, and student achievement within PLC groups?

Research Question 3: How does the perceptions of the PLC team members of the administrator influence the PLC practices, collaboration, and effectiveness?

1.5 Significance of the Study

Cumulatively the research may support previous findings regarding PLCs and identify specific actions and steps a principal can take to support the process of implementing effective professional learning communities (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Christiansen, & Robey, 2015; Morrissey, 2000; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, & Dutton, 2012; Servais, Derrington, & Sanders, 2009). This study will add to the extensive research on professional learning communities and contribute specifically to the role and mindset of the campus principal in building successful PLCs. The benefits will be the information and data available to share with

new and current principals regarding the implementation practices of professional learning communities that improve instructional practices and student achievement and the approaches to building a transformative culture and community. The research also aims to identify ways to overcome the challenges that PLC implementation can bring by identifying specific actions and steps a principal can take to support this development.

1.6 Definition of Terms

The terms listed below are defined to assist the reader with an understanding of the concepts that will be discussed throughout the paper and to provide contextual information on how these concepts will be used in this study.

Professional Learning Community: An ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for student achievement. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators (AllThingsPLC, 2016).

Transformational Leadership: A leadership style that fundamentally aims to foster capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals resulting in extra effort and greater productivity (Leithwood, 1999).

Shared Leadership: A leadership style that broadly distributes leadership responsibility, such that people within a team and organization guide and lead each other while the leader maintains their role and authority (Wilhelm, 2013).

Collaboration: A systematic process in which people work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice to improve individual and collective results. In a PLC, the collaboration focuses on the critical questions of learning: What is it we want each student to

learn? How will we know when each student has learned it? How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning? How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient? (AllThingsPLC, 2016)

School Culture: The assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations, and habits that constitute the norm for the school and guide the work of the educators within it (AllThingsPLC, 2016).

Systems Process: A specific effort to organize the combination of related parts into a coherent whole in a methodical, deliberate, and orderly way toward a particular aim. In a PLC, a systematic process reflects an aspect of the “tight” culture (AllThingsPLC, 2016).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a synthesis of the literature to better understand the principals' roles and actions to include transformational leadership, leadership style, and the process of creating a collective school culture. Through this literature review containing several case study findings, this synthesis further expands on the need for campuses to build organizational capacity by building collaboration and systems thinking. This chapter will share findings that identify practices that are found to thrive in the PLC setting with careful implementation and clear teacher roles and responsibilities.

The principalship is often embarked upon by individuals who are motivated by the work and the possibility to contribute to the growth and success of a campus. Current literature and research address the roles and actions of the principal as a careful balance of building manager and instructional leader. Taking on the role and responsibility of an instructional leader often requires campus-wide change and transformational leadership practices (Marks & Printy, 2003). As a transformational leader, the research supports the need for a united campus culture and the building of organizational capacity. The Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a strategy frequently used to support instructional transformation (DuFour & DuFour, 2013).

A campus principal has the opportunity to make an impact on student achievement and teacher's professional growth through the framework of transformational leadership and the PLC. To implement effective PLC practices intentional planning and action are required by the principal beginning with creating a shared campus culture. This culture will be reflective of the values, priorities, and mission of the campus. Teachers and administrators will contribute to creating an environment that fosters regular communication, teaming and is respectful and

accommodating to the diverse needs of a community. As a result, the dialogue and planning raise the organizational capacity and commitment.

2.2 History of Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

The term *professional learning community (PLC)* began to emerge in the late 1960s referring to teachers working together in collaborative teams as opposed to isolated planning (AllThingsPLC, 2016). Research of this process became explicit in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Susan Rosenholtz's (1989) associate professor of education at the University of Illinois studied 78 schools and found teacher collaboration with a focus on shared goals improved teacher learning and commitment and subsequently student achievement. In 1993, Judith Warren Little and Milbrey McLaughlin conducting research for the Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching at Stanford University with funding from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Educational Research and Improvement through interviews with teachers during three years of field research reported that the most effective schools and departments worked as strong professional communities characterized by:

- Shared norms and beliefs
- Collegial relations
- Collaborative cultures
- Reflective practice
- Ongoing technical inquiry regarding effective practice
- Professional growth
- Mutual support and mutual obligation (AllThingsPLC, 2016).

In 1995, Fred Newmann and Gary Wehlage continued this research through the University of Wisconsin Madison conducting quantitative studies of test scores and surveys and intensive case

studies of over 1,200 schools reported that successful schools used restructuring tools to guide professional learning communities' practices. Educators, in these schools:

- Engaged in a collective effort to achieve a clear, commonly shared purpose for student learning
- Created a collaborative culture to achieve the purpose
- Took collective—rather than individual—responsibility for the learning of all students (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995)

Later that year contributing to this research at the University of Wisconsin through case studies Karen Louis, Sharon Kruse, and Anthony Bryk found PLCs most effective with student achievement were characterized by:

- Reflective dialogue
- Deprivatization of practice
- Collective focus on student learning
- Collaboration
- Shared norms and values.

Despite the research findings nationally there was minor impact on PLC practices (AllThingsPLC, 2016). In 2009, Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker published *Professional learning communities at work[™]: best practices for enhancing students' achievement* and subsequent publications where these findings were compiled and developed into books that have supported the facilitation of these practices. To this day PLCs are not required by any state or federal regulations to include the Texas Education Agency (TEA).

2.3 The Principal's Roles and Actions

With the evolving role of the campus principal in May 2014 TEA revised the Principal User's Guide with the following four Standards:

Standard 1: Instructional Leadership: The principal is responsible for ensuring every student receives high-quality instruction.

Standard 2: Human Capital: The principal is responsible for ensuring there are high-quality teachers and staff in every classroom throughout the school.

Standard 3: Executive Leadership: The principal is responsible for modeling a consistent focus and personal responsibility for improving student outcomes.

Standard 4: School Culture: The principal is responsible for establishing and implementing a shared vision and culture of high expectations for all staff and students.

A central responsibility of the campus principal found in the literature is the coordinating of a campus mission, vision, and goals (Alvoid, 2014). The mission, vision, and goals are designed to support the development of student performance objectives and identify instructional strategies to focus and improve instructional practices and student academic achievement. Lorzeau (as cited in Leithwood, 1982, p. 321), suggests that "the effective principal works toward balanced attention to instructional leadership, routine administration, and human relations." Managing these targeted roles and developing a cohesive culture can support improved instructional practices and student achievement.

The mission and goals guide the daily decisions and actions of the campus administration, faculty, and staff. "It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become" (Quinn, 2011, p.4). This responsibility is

critical for a principal to be aware of and understand in their daily practices. An administrator will build shared instructional leadership capacity by connecting learning and leading (Lambert, 2005). To support goal achievement, the administrators will be required to create and support a unified campus culture and transform leadership (Alvoid, 2014). “Transformational leadership seeks to elicit high levels of commitment from all school personnel and to develop organizational capacity” (Marks, 2003, p. 377). This is critical so there is shared responsibility for the systems that support strong instructional practices and student achievement.

National policies such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) govern campus academic expectations and have shifted administrative leadership and priorities and reoriented the campus focus to that of student learning. Principals are called to be instructional leaders and demonstrate their effectiveness by transforming schools into safe learning spaces and system-thinking organizations that establish a clear mission, frame school goals, build staff capacity, and align staff actions to the goals while maintaining high expectations for both the teachers and students in their schools (Moore, 2009; Taylor, 2014). Hattie (2009) and Waters et al., (2003), a meta-analysis with 30 years of studies regarding the influences on achievement in school-aged students provides practitioners with guidance on the curricular, instructional, and school practices resulting in increased student achievement. Furthermore, instructional leadership actions that are the most impactful to student achievement include creating a culture and community of shared beliefs through open communication, setting clear expectations, participation with teachers in professional learning to keep the faculty current on educational theory and practice, involving teachers in decision making, planning for needed resources for instruction, and the evaluation of teaching and curriculum. As principals shift their roles on campuses to meet national policy and local needs, they begin by observing the campus,

identifying strengths and needs, making critical decisions, and prioritizing actions that support student academic achievement (Waters et al., 2003).

Specifically, research finds that administrators' support and implementation of professional learning communities (PLC) can contribute to creating campus practices that meet student academic goals, build leadership capacity, and support effective instructional leadership practices. These practices require creating a campus culture where teachers have opportunities to lead, and principals build a coherent capital management system (Broin & Leaders, 2015). Broin and Leaders (2015) while conducting a case study with New Leaders to develop policy recommendations found that creating support roles and promoting differentiated leadership positions to meet school and individual needs will create a campus culture where teacher leadership skills and responsibility will rise. These practices require teacher leadership training, networking, time, and resource allocation that meets the changing needs and approaches. Subsequently, Broin & Leaders (2015) found that principals can support creating this culture in PLCs by collaborating with teachers to build targeted practices such as “analyze data, develop classroom-level goals, and observe and provide feedback on their instructional practice” (p. 12). Principals need to be aware of and work with each team to develop this campus culture and teams that prioritize scheduling and time management for PLCs and observation of instructional practices (Broin & Leaders, 2015). Gentilucci et al. (2013) using the qualitative approach of respondent-driven sampling, using “snowballing sampling” with a mathematical model weighing that sample to compensate for the fact that the sample was collected in a non-random way found that new principals viewed their role as collaborators, communicators, counselors, and motivators in this role and made a difference in building campus cultures that impacted students and staff achievement which was supported through professional learning communities.

Through the implementation of PLC, administrators have the opportunity to work directly with campus grade levels and content teams to differentiate for the identified needs of each campus group. Gary Waddell (2008), found through the second year of implementation of PLCs that teachers had a deeper understanding of literacy instruction and the campus instructional model of delivery. Together they created a model of peer coaching, observations of model lessons, and follow-up training to support the campus needs and instructional routines that resulted in collective student achievement (Waddell, 2008). The most effective principals create strong leadership teams that include administrators, deans, grade level leaders, instructional coaches, and mentor teachers in place to help them implement school improvement strategies such as professional learning communities (Broin, 2015).

The role and responsibilities of the principal in these varied capacities are multi-faceted while continuing to ensure building and personnel management the role of instructional leader requires careful steps for implementation of targeted instructional practices that ensure student achievement.

2.3.1 The Principal as a Transformational Leader

Transformational leadership provides intellectual direction and aims at innovating within the organization while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making (Conley & Goldman, 1994; Leithwood, 1994). The principal's role as a transformational leader is to build shared leadership and a professional culture while working with the faculty and staff to identify and solve instructional problems to improve organizational performance (Lambert, 2005; Marks, 2003). "As the organization's instructional leader, the principal is the primary source of assistance and monitoring" (Angelle, 2006, as cited in Fuller, 2011, p. 179). "Such an action orientation theoretically encompasses everything a principal does during the day to

support the achievement of students and the ability of teachers to teach” (Marks, 2003, 373). As an example, Ruff (2005) in a collective case study using varied interviews and observations noted in the observation of a principal:

throughout the day and sometimes two or three times an hour, he was observed leaving his office to spend time with people, including teachers, staff, and parents; then, he would return to his office, check his e-mail, and work on the program management. (p. 563)

Program management includes the establishment of teacher learning opportunities, the use of physical and human resources, and the design and implementation of instructional systems.

Quinn (2011) using Larsen’s (1985) Instructional Activity Questionnaire (IAQ) with elementary principals serving in Gwinnett County, Georgia's Distinguished Title I and non-Title I elementary schools for at least 3 consecutive years and the Georgia Criterion-Referenced Competency Test with students suggests, “that a school performing in an unusually successful way has a principal who is exceptional and who exhibits specific instructional leadership behaviors that influence school success” (p. 2). As a transformational leader, an exceptional principal consistently monitors and supports campus instructional systems.

Orr (2005), using a collaborative inquiry research approach with six principals from low performing schools and two university educational department researchers meeting two to three times a week for 18 months identified five transformational leadership strategies used by principals that shaped how they worked with their staff toward school improvement: (1) to create a vision; (2) identifying multiple ways of accomplishing goals; (3) identify and meet all grade level/department needs; (4) supporting school and staff in meeting district initiatives; and (5) viewing their leadership as continuous training. These types of practices in transformational leadership require working cooperatively with teacher input to identify programs and practices

that will assist in reaching campus goals to successfully impact as many students as possible (Ruff & Shoho, 2005). “Effective principals are able to define priorities focused on the central mission of the school and gain support for these priorities from all stakeholders” (Leithwood, 1982, p. 335). Developing clear campus goals will guide the planning and priorities to successfully aim to attain the campus mission.

As a result, principals act as instructional coaches and will need to know the content and instructional practices to support teachers through observational coaching (Youngs, 2007). Alvoid (2014) in a report for the Center for American Progress referenced several case studies — which looked at Gwinnett County Public Schools in Gwinnett County, Georgia; Denver Public Schools in Denver, Colorado; District of Columbia Public Schools in Washington, D.C.; Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in Charlotte, North Carolina; Uplift Education in Dallas, Texas; and Northeast Leadership Academy at North Carolina State University—to inform principal professional-development recommendations recognizing that the attainment of content knowledge can be challenging for the administrator with varying campus grade levels, content area teachers and varying instructional needs of teachers and students. In the same way, Youngs (2007) interviews and observations of Connecticut principals and teachers research demonstrated how an elementary principals’ understandings of literacy-reform initiatives on campus supported reading instructional practices at varying grade levels. The role of the principal and teacher comes together under the practice of instructional coaching. Research discovers that instructional coaching has a significant positive impact on student outcomes (Alvoid, 2014). The coaching framework supports the culture of communication by reviewing teacher instructional practices and the development of educational programs designed to meet the targeted needs of students (Foskett, 1966). To illustrate, one principal who implements coaching stated that “if you really

want to be engaged in staff development... the place where you can really make a difference is right here in the principal's office working with the teachers" (Young, 2007, p. 113). Further supporting the requirement of the principal to be an instructional leader.

Teachers also play a significant role in transformational leadership and the implementation of effective PLCs. Teachers are provided the opportunity to capitalize on their knowledge and skills to play a partner role in curriculum, instruction, and assessment under transformational leadership. In collaboration, teachers with principals identify areas of student and instructional strengths and needs to create professional development plans to ensure growth (Marks, 2003). These practices foster a partnership in decision-making and a raised level of commitment resulting in professional communication, improved instructional practices, and student achievement (Marks, 2003).

Orr (2005) found that, "transformational principal leadership directly influenced organizational learning, which in turn affected teachers' work and student participation and engagement in school" (p. 26). This system of shared governance and distributed leadership supports a dynamic leadership culture built around a vision-driven, student-focused conceptual framework for school improvement.

In conclusion, as a transformational leader the principal will demonstrate the following qualities (Ludenberg, 2003):

- Idealized influence: The principal is charismatic and the teachers and faculty respect and admire them.
- Individualized Consideration: The principal cares about each individual team members concerns and development.

- Intellectual Stimulation: The principal provides team members with interesting and challenging tasks developing problem-solving.
- Inspirational Motivation: The team is confident in the principal's vision and values and there are clear expectations.

2.3.2 Principals Leadership Style

A principal's model of management sets a campus tone and directly impacts a school culture (Christiansen & Robey, 2015). Principals who have established cultures of high academic achievement set high expectations, hold teachers and students accountable for the learning, and build shared values in a trusting environment (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016). Studies have found that impactful PLCs have principals who establish the integrated leadership of transformational and shared leadership while being the moving force of change (Thompson et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003). Principals have described this role as being the "reform communicator" (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016, p.194). Using transformational and shared leadership, a principal is described as the "lead teacher and lead learner, and steward of the learning process, by sharing authority, facilitating instruction, building trusting relationships, and supporting data-informed decisions (Thompson et al., 2004, p.4). The principal supports collaboration and teamwork, and teachers are able to participate in developing a shared vision and the decision-making process to support student achievement (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016, Thompson et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003).

In addition, studies find that teacher collaboration in PLCs with strong administrative support can serve as a predictor for student achievement (Woodland, 2016). The principal supports teachers by facilitating teacher growth, requiring everyone to attend to instruction and learning, and monitoring and supporting goal setting (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Marks &

Printy, 2003; Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016). Subsequently, the PLC is a setting for shared decision making, dispersed leadership, staff empowerment, and collaboration that demands the attention, energy, effort, and support from the team (DuFour & DuFour, 2013).

In the education setting, principals practice collaboration through the integration of transformational and shared leadership in PLCs to lead instructional reform and improve teaching and learning (Wilhelm, 2013). A principal's actions, attitudes, and approach can help people work together in PLCs to build a culture of collaboration and systems thinking that impacts learning and student achievement.

2.3.3 Principal Creating a School Culture

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2019) states that there are 3 pillars of effective principalship: building culture, empowering people, and optimizing systems. According to Fullan (2007) school culture can be defined as the guiding beliefs and values evident in the way a school operates. A positive school culture will reflect positive interpersonal connections and interactions and share a core set of interwoven beliefs and behaviors. A school culture needs a shared vision, mission, values, and norms focused on student learning (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Wilhelm, 2010). This requires teamwork from the varying stakeholders to clarify, coordinate and communicate a clear mission and vision for a campus and community (Marks & Printy, 2003). With these shared foundations, all stakeholders can work together responsibly with a sense of ownership to develop shared goals to impact meaningful learning and a campus's future (Thompson et al., 2004; Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016, Christiansen & Robey, 2015). Unified PLCs are a key component to support the reculturing of schools into student-driven organizations focused on student learning and supporting instructional

improvement (Thompson et al., 2004; Vescio, Ross & Adams, 2008, Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016).

A campus culture builds unity while carefully considering the diversity within faculty, staff, and most importantly student population while striving for goal attainment. Effective principals create a campus culture that cooperatively follows a vision with these different members of the community. Creating this culture requires the soft skills of leadership—such as relationship building and praise—enabling principals to establish trust and nurture a cohesive, positive, and professional learning community (Alvoid, 2014). This social trust can cultivate collaboration.

The vision of the campus guides stakeholders to design initiatives that are implemented to “create positive, engaging school climates that increase the likelihood of improved academic achievement and other forms of student performance” (Jacobson, 2007, p. 3). These dynamics are supported in faculty and team building.

Relationships are developed through communication. Leithwood (1982) in a review of research on principal effectiveness found that principals foster interactions among teachers about professional issues through activities such as staff meetings, professional learning communities, and vertical alignment teams. The research further notes that opportunities for regular communication with the community and parents are fostered in numerous ways: encouraging and supporting regular visits to their children’s classrooms, by holding meetings and conferences, by building parent-teacher groups, and by becoming highly integrated into the school community themselves. The daily personal involvement and communication of the principal is crucial to culture development and can be exhibited in actions as simple as learning the names of children in the school (Ruff, 2005).

Campus cultures that are impactful to students and faculty require relationship building and multiple opportunities for communication. Youngs (2007), states that, “principals can influence teacher growth by the types of professional cultures they promote in their schools” (p.104). In building a cohesive culture, principals received positive feedback from their tenured staff (Petti, 2013). Papa et al, (2002) (as cited in Fuller, 2011) found that creating a positive campus culture supports a principal’s influence on the people working in their schools. The research consistently supports the need for awareness and action in building a campus culture with effective communication and working relationships. Ruff (2005) in a collective case study using varied interviews and observations found:

One elementary principal used conflict management to establish and support a productive culture within the school. When too much tension existed, she acted to lower the level of tension. When too little tension existed, she acted to increase the level of tension through direct confrontation. Team building was used to support relationships, build trust, and sustain a productive culture. (p. 567)

It is important to note that conflict management was situational and always implemented strategically— to build and strengthen teams in reaching goal attainment (Ruff, 2005). The knowledge and ability to implement these practices require a skilled administrator.

In establishing culture principals influence recruitment, selection, and retention of a well-qualified team of teachers (Fuller, 2011). Youngs (2007) supports the work of universities and experienced teachers in preparing and mentoring new teachers as an extension of school culture. Similarly, research conducted by the Center for Teaching Quality indicated that, “principals can create positive working conditions that encourage teachers to remain at a school regardless of the student demographics or other factors often associated with high levels of teacher turnover”

(Fuller, 2011, p. 175). It is also the principal's responsibility to collaborate with their team to build a culture with teacher commitment as a central part of creating a school's capacity (Orr, 2005).

2.4 Organizational Capacity

Transformational leadership also brings together campus knowledge to support further growth relying on the partnership and leadership of teachers. Ruff's (2005) findings state that "principals and superintendents are being asked to share power as they are simultaneously being held to higher standards of accountability" (p. 555). Building a sense of teamwork around a campus mission is critical to building culture and academic growth and achievement. The principal is a facilitator in building communities of learners that foster teacher growth and meet students' needs (Marks, 2003). This creates a shared responsibility, and the principal plays a significant role in building shared leadership and a professional culture (Ruff, 2005).

"Instructional leadership must be a shared community undertaking and is the professional work of everyone in the school" (Lambert, 2002, p. 37). Petti (2013) while implementing a university-district partnership and collecting video documentation of instructional rounds, observations, interviews, focus groups, and artifacts found that partnership evolves based on the level of involvement of the participants. To build organizational capacity the knowledge and resources of the principal and teachers are shared through various interactions to include PLCs. In these settings, principals can seek staff advice, encourage participation in decision making and use this to work continuously on program improvement (Leithwood, 2002). Each school needs design features-structures, processes, and roles-that promote leadership capacity (Lambert, 2005). Burch (2005) in the review of the Student Achievement Guarantee in Education (SAGE) program found that implementation can be a slow process, building in and participating in communication

opportunities can be an initial step to building the needed dialogue. Through this dialogue in PLCs principals and teachers begin to share the same concerns and work together toward their goals.

Building organizational capacity may require the delegation of administrative tasks which may require the redesigning of the school's organizational charts and job descriptions (Alvoid, 2014). Youngs (2007) research finds one shared role includes experienced teachers being actively involved and sharing in the responsibility of new teacher induction and mentoring. School administrators can support these mentoring relationships by supporting frameworks such as PLCs where such relationships can occur. Likewise, PLCs create opportunities for teachers to model for one another and this dialogue is another activity to support building capacity. "By involving experienced teachers in mentoring and staff development one administrator helped to create and sustain an integrated professional culture" (Youngs, 2007, p. 114). Lambert (2002) professor emeritus at California State University, Hayward supports principals building organizational capacity by, "supporting teachers and parents in joining action teams (PLCs) to examine student performance data and work, conducting action research to discover new data, developing a cadre of peer coaches, and expanding the staff development program" (p. 64). By prioritizing organizational capacity through PLCs, a principal further aligns a campus mission, vision, and goals includes and empowers all stakeholders, and supports student achievement.

2.4.1 Organizational Learning Collaboration

In building organizational capacity, a principal can support and utilize professional learning communities which require collaboration through collective action and continuous organizational learning to improve student outcomes (Thompson et al., 2004; Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016). The teachers and administration must be disciplined and committed to the

collaborative PLC process where development and knowledge are continuous and shared by the entire school to create results (Thompson et al., 2004). This transformational leadership approach improves organizational performance and raises participants' commitment levels (Marks & Printy, 2003). These collaborative practices require collective and reflective dialogue and critical reflection of day-to-day practices about curriculum, instruction, and student development respecting teachers as the classroom experts to ensure all students' needs are met (Vescio et al., 2008, Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Woodland, 2016). The information gathered empowers teachers to develop PLC meeting agendas supporting the collaboration and establishment of shared leadership (Vescio et al., 2008; Marks & Printy, 2003). In PLCs principals and teachers collaborate as communities of learners recognizing how shared knowledge improves student learning (Marks & Printy, 2003; Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Collaborative work is the process of reaching the goal of improved instruction and student achievement (Vescio et al., 2008).

2.4.2 Systems Thinking

PLCs whose goal is to meet the learning needs of students must have a knowledge and understanding of systems thinking and mental models (Vescio et al., 2008). “Every child’s life is a system. Every educational practice is a system” (Senge, et al., 2021). Students experience the entire K-12 educational system to include curriculum and legislative priorities that are set outside the district and the expertise of teachers and administrators’ instructional knowledge and understanding shared in a PLC (Senge et al., 2012). Systems thinking and mental models are bodies of knowledge that help identify patterns of thinking and possibilities for change (Thompson et al., 2004). Through shared leadership in PLCs teachers and administrators identify interrelated components of the educational system and points of leverage so each instructional decision and action produces academic results for students (Senge et al., 2012). Additionally, in

the PLC the team identifies different kinds of learners and varied instructional needs. The PLC practice builds circular loops of a cause-and-effect relationship where the dialogue and feedback in these meetings “reinforces processes to accelerate and provide growth, and balances processes, which provide stability,” (Senge et al., 2012, p.135). The PLC practices and this understanding guides teachers in bridging the research-practice divide, supports instructional problems of practice, supports the development of critical thinking, and fills the knowing-doing gap to increase organizational capacity (Thompson et al., 2004; Woodland, 2016).

2.5 Professional Learning Community (PLC)

Texas Education Code Sec. 21.404 entitles every teacher to uninterrupted 450 minutes of planning and preparation time every two weeks. During this time teachers can choose to work together or independently. This independent unstructured time without campus leadership support has not proven to improve instructional practices or impact student achievement whereas members of PLCs have been found to learn through systematic and disciplined collective inquiry. They identify what all students will learn and how to assess this knowledge, evaluate current student knowledge, identify areas of strength and weakness, locate researched-based methods to intervene and support student learning, re-teach, and enrich educational opportunities, and have continued accountability and monitoring of instruction (Woodland, 2016; Christiansen & Robey, 2015; Wilhelm, 2013). PLC meetings need to be timely, relevant, provide necessary resources, and support a continuous culture of learning and improvement (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016). Through this process, it is critical to identify boundaries and limitations that may impact results (Senge, 2012).

Research finds that well-developed PLCs have clear collaborative relationships between PLC practices, leadership, and student learning that positively impacts teaching practices and

student achievement (Vescio et al., 2008; Servais et al., 2009). Results-oriented PLCs collect data to measure the outcomes and improve student learning (Servais et al., 2009). The PLC groups become student-centered and participate in instructional changes to promote inquiry and understanding to meet students' needs for content mastery. Teachers are learners in the PLC action research setting and can participate in seminar groups, reflection, team research, and discussion (Thompson et al., 2004;). An additional benefit to working in these settings is the ability for administrators to identify professional development needs for teachers, support teacher development and expertise, and support student achievement (Vescio et al., 2008).

PLCs can develop a school culture of systems thinking where everyone is a teacher, learner, and leader impacting student achievement (Thompson et al.; Vescio et al., 2008). PLCs require active listening and dialogue to develop instructional expertise (Wilhelm, 2010). Together new strategies and methods are implemented focusing on what and how students learn (Thompson et al., 2004; Christiansen & Robey, 2015). Classrooms become sites for collective inquiry, intentional investigation, and results-orientated high-quality instructional practices and learning (Vescio et al., 2008, Christiansen & Robey, 2015; Woodland, 2016). In these settings, the principal builds teacher capacity encouraging teachers to pursue the development of their skill base and practice while empowering them in decision making (Thompson et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003). These practices imbed student learning and teacher collaboration into the culture (Vescio et al., 2008).

Dufour and Eaker (1998) in *Professional Learning Communities at Work*—describe the PLC as an organization where:

people are united by a common purpose, shared vision, collective commitments, and specific, measurable goals; where collaborative teams engage in action research and

collective inquiry into the big questions of teaching and learning; where continuous improvement cycles are built into the routine practices of the school; and where gathering evidence of student learning is a constant focus.

Servais (2009) in case studies of PLCs in a principal preparation program, an elementary school team, a leadership team, and a business partnership identified that the following PLC principles should be applied: a focused purpose on learning, collaboration, and team building to create a collaborative culture, collective inquiry, action, continuous improvement, assessment of results and celebrating success, creating a results-oriented organization. Similarly, Bolman and Deal's (1997) in *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership (2nd ed.)* recommendations for professional learning communities are goal setting, planning, creating structures, and technology implementation while supporting individual teacher differences. A culture conducive to professional learning communities should be supported by structures and systems that support teacher leadership roles, promote peer collaboration and critical feedback, data-driven decisions on teacher practice and student outcomes and maintain a sharp focus on student success (Broin & Leaders, 2015). PLCs create documented instructional plans that bring focus to team meetings (Burnett, 2002).

This approach to student academic achievement and teacher development is supported by Knowles' (1984) research on adult learning identifies andragogy as a best practice providing the learner with high levels of involvement in planning, experiential learning, and relevance. PLC implementation also takes into consideration *The Knowing-Doing Gap* by Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) where an educator may have instructional knowledge yet fail to apply this knowledge in daily practice. Thus, the PLC provides a relevant safe place for professional growth, planning, and implementation of instructional routines. "If you do it, then you will know it" (Pfeffer and

Sutton, 2000, p. 27). After the implementation of plans created by the PLC, the process is cyclical, and teams continue with follow-up sessions to debrief on implementation, progress, and future planning.

Coviello and DeMatthews (2016) in a case study found that principals must take time to understand the context of the campus as they approach implementing professional learning communities to have teacher support. Burnett (2002) as a new principal at Boones Mill Elementary School in Franklin County, VA in *How we Formed our Community: Lights and Cameras are Optional, but Action is Essential* describes the principal's challenge:

not as persuading staff of the benefits of an initiative but helping them experience those benefits. Principals must create situations that lead people to act, helping them do rather than talk about doing. Once teachers are familiar with and practicing the changes, support will follow. Commitment follows competence. (p. 52)

As such it is the administrator's role and responsibility to facilitate and support the implementation of PLCs.

2.5.1 Implementation of Professional Learning Communities

The implementation of professional learning communities is a process that Coviello and DeMatthews (2016) describe as needing to begin with communication, connection, and building trusting relationships before implementing PLC practices. Through action research administrators have found varied approaches with the implementation of PLCs resulting in student academic achievement and improved instructional practices.

Waddell (2008) a former administrator and current curriculum services administrator for the San Mateo County Office of Education and his team began with two D's - data and dialogue and thus had the opportunity to take a closer look at the data. The data showed many children

performing well and, “identified the achievement gap between the highest-performing group (white students) and the lowest-performing groups (black, Latino, English language learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students) was around 40%” (Waddell, 2008, p.19). The data brought awareness and planning for differentiated instruction, and together they chose an instructional model that was research-based and met student instructional needs (Waddell, 2008). Waddell (2008) hired substitutes to come in and cover teachers for half-day meetings with the campus literacy specialist to continue discussions about findings, planning, and bridging the gap of intellectual understanding and the implementation of instructional practices. These actions changed the follow-up conversations from assigning blame to owning the student achievement of students and transforming the staff into a community of learners (Waddell, 2008). PLCs provide communication where honest instructional questions, advice, and critical input are provided (Sterrett, 2009). In the same way, Sterret (2009) a former administrator found when negative discourse began peers worked collaboratively to shift to a focus on problem-solving to move towards growth and idea development. Waddell (2008) concludes:

The journey to becoming a professional learning community requires addressing specific practices - what shall we change? - as well as an attitude - how shall we create and sustain a belief that it can be done? We began with the assumption that all children could perform well, and that poor performance was a reflection of our practice (p. 20).

This was a change in practice, mindset, approach, and essentially culture.

Becky Burnette (2002) as a new principal at Boones Mill Elementary School in Franklin County, VA shares in *How we Formed our Community: Lights and Cameras are Optional, but Action is Essential* began in the summer meeting with the staff in small-group discussions about

the school. At each grade-level and department meeting, she took notes as teams responded to the questions:

- What makes this school such a good school?
- What can we do to make it an even better school?
- As the new principal, what do I need to know and understand about this school (p.52)?

She identified a unified response in the valuing of one another and the team of Boones Mill.

Burnett (2002) built on the campus value of teamwork and created a master schedule that supported the collaborative culture essential to a professional learning community. Each team established team norms that described how team members would work together. These group norms addressed timeliness and preparedness, expectations for active participation, confidentiality, and being respectful (Burnett, 2002). Burnett (2002) proposed a series of critical questions for focusing team efforts and building a common vocabulary. Examples included:

- Are we clear on what students are to learn and the evidence they must show that they have learned it?
- Based on our analysis of student achievement data, what are the strengths and weaknesses of our students' performance?
- How will we judge the quality of student work?
- How does our curriculum align with state standards and state tests (p.53)?

Burnett's (2002) next steps were to have, "every team commit to a specific, measurable student achievement goal, to identify the action steps teachers would take to achieve the goal and to outline the evidence they would monitor to assess their progress" (p. 54). Burnett (2002) also found the time management necessary to be a part of each teaming and planning session would

be challenging so she implemented a feedback system that provided teams with the opportunity to document discussions, finding and suggest needed resources. With the collaborative efforts of administration and staff, the implementation of PLCs at Boones Mill Elementary resulted in improved instructional practice and improved student academic achievement.

A critical component for effective PLCs is teaming, collaboration, and collective inquiry. “We are more effective when we take a collaborative, democratic approach,” says Principal David O’Hara, Expeditionary Learning School for Community Leaders in Brooklyn, NY. “That means involving staff and students in decision-making and providing everyone at our school with real opportunities to be leaders” (Broin, & Leaders, 2015, p. 3). Broin and Leaders (2015) found that if the principal has not established structures for teachers to regularly work with colleagues to improve their practice, teachers may be uncomfortable giving and receiving critical feedback—a cornerstone of effective professional learning communities and teacher leadership. In the same way, Burnett (2002) found that sharing professional learning community topics and conversations in monthly faculty meetings could support vertical alignment and teamwork. Servais (2009) defines collaboration as being an active member of a team, who takes the time needed to build relationships consistently focused on goal attainment. These positive forms of teaming and collaboration build the relationships that create effective PLCs that developed improved instructional practices and improve student achievement.

2.5.2 Teacher's Role and Responsibilities in the PLC

Research finds that, “schools need outstanding teachers who have content expertise, excellent instructional skills, and a proven record of student academic results” (Broin & Leaders, 2015, p. 6). These teachers engage students, assess appropriately, and differentiate instruction and these skills should be shared with colleagues and the campus through PLCs to support student achievement (Sterett, 2009). Principals can support the development of such teachers and improve instructional practices by creating school environments in which staff members lead from every seat and teacher leadership positions meet campus needs (Broin & Leaders, 2015). This can begin with grade level and content chairperson’s who serve as effective teacher leaders with strong instructional skills and high leadership potential (Broin & Leaders, 2015). “Teacher leaders need time dedicated to leadership work—not simply built on top of other responsibilities—and principals need flexibility to create supportive schedules and systems” (Broin & Leaders, 2015 p. 14). The research of Broin and Leaders, (2015) found that principals can support school-based teacher leadership development by providing opportunities for data-driven analyses of school, teacher, and student needs; multiple opportunities for teachers to learn, practice, receive feedback, and reflect on leadership concepts and skills; time, space, and structures that promote peer collaboration. Teachers’ roles and responsibilities within the PLC need the support and accountability of the principal regarding time, effective PLC practices, and establishing a cyclical process of improvement.

2.5.3 Implementation of Professional Learning Communities Findings

Coviello and DeMatthews’s (2016) research has documented how PLCs can positively impact school culture and raise student achievement yet during reform and implementation campus relationships and circumstances are crucial factors that must be considered by principals.

The underlying assumption is that learning and development involve a progression of participation and self-growth and the learners develop patterns of participation that add to their identities as learners and effective practitioners (Celoria & Roberson, 2015).

Servais et al., (2009) found that beginning with a book study provided a structure to implement the concepts of the professional learning community in a smaller group setting that would later be implemented with the larger community. The research further found that “slow and steady” should be the mantra for implementing and sustaining a professional learning community that can begin with a book study, grade level practices, and campus implementation. A key to this gradual implementation process is building and maintaining relationships throughout the PLC implementation process (Servais et al., 2009). Through the process, leaders find that they must relinquish control and become a peer in the PLC dialogue process. Servais et al., (2009) found a commitment of time for all stakeholders must be planned.

DuFour & DuFour (2009) identify the steps to the implementation of the PLC as the development of a shared mission (purpose), vision (clear direction), values (collective commitments), and goals (indicators, timelines, and targets) focused on student learning. With these in place, a collaborative culture will begin to develop with a focus on learning. During PLCs collective inquiry regarding current reality and best practices will emerge to develop the action orientation required to support a commitment to continuous improvement for both teachers and students. This is a continuous process that will vary in implementation time dependent on the varied participants’ understanding of the process and consistency of practice. Many campuses begin by implementing consistent weekly practices in the first year and find by year two the conceptual foundations are established, and improved instructional practices and student achievement are a more consistent result.

Waddell's (2008) implementation of professional learning communities in a school year transformed the school from a campus where some teachers were implementing new instructional models to a school that had reached critical mass and shared a common vision and approach to teaching and learning. The student body overall had increased in proficiency (Waddell, 2008). "The human side of the journey had caught up with the technical work around instructional innovation, and every faculty member was ready to engage in the professional learning community" (Waddell, 2008, p. 21). Teachers were committed to trying and possibly failing or having moderate success as opposed to not trying at all (Waddell, 2008). The teachers who were most resistant to this change saw student results, approached Principal Waddell, and requested assistance.

2.6 Conclusion

Under current legislative and local expectations, principals' responsibilities have grown and the focus on student academic achievement is now a major priority. Research shows with student academic progress and learning being a focus a shift in supporting teacher instructional practices and leadership is a key element to foster this academic achievement. These priorities can be met through a transformational leadership approach with the implementation of professional learning communities. Using an action research approach teams work collaboratively, communicate, analyze data, plan, set goals, reflect regularly in a recurrent process to support goal achievement and campus growth.

The literature recognizes the changing role of campus principals and the need for transformational leadership through effective action in professional learning communities to meet the set expectations. Extensive research is done on the process of PLC implementation to build organizational capacity, collaboration, and systems thinking. The research identifies the

key role that teachers have in the process of effective professional learning communities and the needed support from campus administrators to support these teacher leadership roles. The consistent findings of the research show with the planned and collaborative implementation of professional learning communities on a campus student academic achievement, teacher instructional expertise, and leadership opportunities meet and often exceed the expectation.

Understanding these roles and responsibilities brings new knowledge and clarity to the role of the principal regarding instructional practices. A principal must be mindful of the need to intentionally create and support a positive culture to unite the organization. The culture can build communication and relationships that support a campus as an organization of learning. The research clearly supports the development of a principal in the role of a transformational leader to implement results-oriented professional learning communities. However, the challenges, obstacles, individual decision-making, and experiences of principals during implementation are perspectives more unknown. The research needs to explore the mindset and experiences of the principal in building results-oriented PLCs with collaborative cultures and shared leadership through interviews, focus group discussions, and observations to more clearly understand how the varied dynamics of these PLCs are developed and supported from the principal's position of campus leadership.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the research design, methodology, setting, participants, research methods, data analysis, trustworthiness, and positionality for this study. This study used a qualitative approach to allow the researcher to explore the decisions and actions of a principal who supports the development of cultures of collaboration within PLC groups to impact teaching and learning using interviews to build a rich descriptive analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

This study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: As an administrator what beliefs and approaches are most beneficial to support PLC implementation?

Research Question 2: What are the actions and decisions of administrators, who support the development of cultures of collaboration, improve instructional practices and student achievement within PLC groups?

Research Question 3: How does the perceptions of the PLC team members of the administrator influence the PLC practices, collaboration, and effectiveness?

3.2 Research Design

Grounded in the interpretivist paradigm (Sipe & Constable, 1996), the goal of this study was to explore the roles, decisions, and actions of a principal, who has supported the development of cultures of collaboration within PLC groups to impact teaching and learning. Knowledge and understanding of these practices will be interpreted through the observations, conversations, and interactions with the various participants.

This project utilized a qualitative approach because it is best suited to address the goals of the project. Qualitative research seeks to understand how people make sense of their lived experiences and the significance of these experiences in their daily practice (Merriam & Tisdell,

2016). Specifically, I chose an intrinsic case study to allow a deeper insight into the decisions and actions of the principal in the unique case at Jamestown High School where she has implemented cultures of collaboration within PLC groups to impact teaching and learning. Intrinsic case study was used to, “focus on the case itself” (Creswell, 2013, p.100). The intrinsic case study is preferable over the instrumental case study for this project as PLC practices are not required but were implemented in this case using site based managed decision making and may not be similar to varied PLC teams across the region (Stake, 2000). I elaborate on intrinsic case study below.

3.3 Methodology

An intrinsic case study was best suited to understand the unique case at Jamestown HS where the principal through site-based decision making implemented collaborative PLCs that demonstrated improved instructional practices, improved student achievement, and resulted in the entire campus functioning as a professional learning community. Stake (2000) explains case studies are processes of inquiry and interests in individual cases. This intrinsic case study provided insight into understanding the role, decision-making, and actions by the principal contributing to the development of effective PLCs. Within PLCs, there are complex occurrences and relationships to be studied that contribute to the committee's success (Christiansen & Robey, 2015). Purposeful sampling was used which is the study of a case that reflects implementation of effective PLCs with a participating administrator (Glesne, 2016). Specifically, the case of the PLC phenomenon at Jamestown HS (pseudonym) where the principal has been working for nearly two years to implement PLC processes (Stake, 2000). The bounded system was PLCs, including the principal, the instructional leadership team, and a campus team of teachers. The

study was these bounded systems as campus wide implementation is still in the first two years of implementation.

3.4 Setting

The intrinsic case study is best suited for this study as the implementation of PLCs was driven by the campus principal in this unique case at Jamestown HS. The purposeful sampling of the unique case at Jamestown HS was used as current PLC practices reflect the focus of the study according to district reputation (Stake, 2000). At Jamestown High School in Sageland ISD (pseudonym), the principal has been working with her leadership team over the past two years through the stages and development of the PLC to implement effective practices with groups of teachers. Sageland ISD does not require administrators to implement PLCs, does not provide a district handbook or expectations, and in 2021-2022 initiated a district based, “Deep PLC” where varying teachers from different content areas meet monthly with central office administration to review the alignment of district expectations and campus practices. PLC practices at the campus level are a site-based managed decision. At Jamestown HS, the teachers and the instructional leadership team have received training and have spent extensive time under current leadership implementing PLC practices to improve instructional practices and student achievement. This case is unique in the amount of time and guidance the principal along with the leadership team have invested in implementing effective PLC practices.

3.5 Participants

Participants were recruited via purposeful sampling at a campus with PLC teams who have implemented effective PLC practices under the guidance of the campus principal (Glesne, 2016). For the purpose of this study, effective PLC practices include collaborative teams of teachers, instructional leaders, and administrators who have a reputation within the district for

the implementation of effective PLCs. Participants included one principal who demonstrated leadership practices in implementing PLCs, two PLC groups: Algebra PLC containing four members and an English PLC containing seven members, and a group of four teachers who chose to participate in the focus group. Instructional leaders in addition to the principal included the Assistant Principal(s) and Instructional Coaches. Instructional coaches are support personnel who assist teachers with coaching, modeling, and instructional development to support student achievement. Team leads are teachers that are members of a team and have taken on the leadership role as a grade level chair. The PLC teams were identified by the principal and were required to meet the criteria of having worked together for a minimum of a year, demonstrated changed instructional practices, and have documented improved student achievement results to include, but not limited to State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR), and End of Course (EOC) assessments.

No minors participated in the research and none of the participants were anticipated to be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence. Human subject involvement in this project began once the interview and focus group process were IRB approved and ended once the data collection and analysis process described herein was completed; data collection and analysis took place within a three-month period. For participants who chose to participate within both the interviews and focus groups, the total amount of time involved was estimated to be approximately two to three non-consecutive hours.

3.6 Research Methods

Interviews with the principal, a focus group meeting with varied PLC members, observations of PLCs, and the review of artifacts from PLC meetings and data was needed to better understand the work of PLC implementation over the previous two-year time frame . Semi-

structured interviews were conducted to allow for flexibility in response from participants while exploring the experience of the principal in the PLC phenomenon (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016).

Interviews and the focus group were audio-recorded to facilitate transcription of the discussion. After the interviews were held subsequent meetings, conversations and emails were exchanged when further questions or clarification was needed.

Participants were recruited in person and via emails sent to administrators, teachers, and instructional leaders. Potential participants were able to contact me to receive more information, including the informed consent document, and to receive information regarding the interview or focus group in which they were participating. Informed consent documents were provided to potential participants when they expressed interest in participating in interviews and focus groups. Potential participants were asked to sign the informed consent document before engaging in an interview and/or focus group. Each participant was provided with a copy of the appropriate informed consent document to keep, and additional copies of the said document were provided to participants as requested. I kept the signed informed consent document for the duration of the study. Since observations occurred at a SISD school, district consent was required and obtained upon approval of UTEP IRB. In all cases, observations did not focus on any one individual but rather focused on the working relations between PLC team members and the principal to observe the principal's beliefs, approaches, actions, and decisions in developing PLCs on a campus.

3.6.1 Artifact Review

I intended to review district policies and handbooks in Sageland ISD before conducting interviews, observations, and focus groups; however I found that there is currently no district policy or handbooks regarding PLC practices and expectations. These practices are completely site-based managed. Prior to interviews, focus group, and observations I reviewed meeting

agendas, minutes, and data provided by the principal and PLC that demonstrated improved student achievement. Meeting agendas included member sign-in, a list of agenda items, four questions addressing the short cycle of instruction, and next steps. Data reviewed included both Mathematics and the English departments' data learning reports which categorized questions into four categories; Category 1: one clearly defined correct answer, no wrong answer is more than 10%, Category 2: one common obvious wrong answer is above 10%, Category 3: two common wrong answers more than 10%; possibly half of the students getting the incorrect answer and Category 4: answer choices all over the place. These data learning reports also considered the performance of subpopulations in comparison to campus wide performance.

3.6.2 *Principal interview*

Three open-ended, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the principal to better understand the role, thinking, decision-making process, and specific actions the principal took to support the implementation of professional learning communities. The initial meeting provided an opportunity to acquaint ourselves and to begin to familiarize ourselves regarding PLCs. The second meeting focused on PLC implementation using the Principal Interview Protocol as tentative questions (See Appendix A). These questions were based on the findings of the principal's role in the literature review focused on the principal training and preparation, the implementation of PLCs and shared instructional leadership and decision making developed to better understand the role of the principal in PLC implementation. The final meeting was used to finalize any subsequent questions and seek clarification raised throughout the interviews. After each interview, a transcription of the interview was sent to the principal for additional feedback and clarification. The time and location were at the preference of the principal to support the comfort and confidence in the conversation with one face-to-face meeting and subsequent

meetings via zoom. The principal's privacy was protected by collaborative negotiation regarding timing, location, and course of the interviews. Interviews were scheduled by the principal for a time and place selected in which the principal indicated she felt comfortable engaging in interviews in both office meetings and via zoom. This ensured that the principal was in as much control as possible regarding whether the information she shared may be overheard by people other than myself. If at any time before or during the interview(s) the principal wished to stop participating or skip a question, she was free to do so. This ensured that her privacy was maintained in terms of personal or sensitive information she might share during an interview. The interviews took between 45-60 minutes. The Principal Interview Protocol questions were provided to better understand the principal's role and responsibility in the campus professional learning community, actions, contributions to curriculum and instruction, approaches to monitoring the work of the PLC and instruction, and to further explore her decision-making process, attitudes, feelings, and emotions.

Interviews with the campus principal were anticipated to identify specific actions the principal took to implement professional learning communities, the role and responsibility of the principal in the campus professional learning community, decision-making practices, contributions made to curriculum and instruction, and to identify any connection between PLC meetings and the approach to improving instruction. A possible connection may be found between a principal's active participation in PLCs and the monitoring of improved instructional practices. Furthermore, the interviews were intended to identify the reflective process of the principal in the PLC process.

3.6.3 *PLC Focus Group*

A focus group of PLC team members was used to facilitate a discussion with a group of individuals with knowledge of the PLC phenomenon and the contribution of the campus principal. The questions were used as a guide to better understand the role of the principal in this process. Participants were able to add their observations, perspectives, and insights. One focus group discussion was conducted with members of varied PLC teams for approximately 60 minutes.

This discussion provided the opportunity for an interactive discussion where participants talked about the dynamics of PLC development and contributions of the principal that they may not have otherwise discussed (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016). Focus group participants were four members of PLC teams who had worked collaboratively for a minimum of a year to implement PLC practices with evidence of improved instructional practices and improved student achievement. The focus group occurred via zoom as preferred by the consenting members of the PLC to ensure they felt comfortable and safe in conversation. Alternately, one participant did express their concerns regarding the scheduling of the focus group and a differently scheduled meeting was conducted to accommodate the participant. Focus group participants were offered the opportunity to use pseudonyms in the focus group and were informed that participation in the focus group required that all information provided therein by other participants must remain strictly confidential, including participants' pseudonyms or assumed identities. Participants were able to choose a pseudonym, or one would be assigned to them. The principal chose one and other agreed to have one assigned to them. Although confidentiality expectations were explicitly reviewed with participants there was still limited control over participants outside of the focus group setting and there was the possibility that such information could be compromised.

Focus group members included Mr. Marcus (pseudonym) who was working as an instructional coach supporting the English department and had been teaching for eight years, previously had worked with a testing publisher, Ms. Susie (pseudonym) had been teaching high school English for 23 years, Ms. Beatriz (pseudonym) had been teaching math for four years, and Ms. Yolie (pseudonym) had 13 years of experience as a classroom teacher and instructional coach currently supporting the social studies, math and physical education departments.

See Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Protocol for the questions provided to identify the perception of the principal's role and responsibility in the campus professional learning community. Questions were developed using the PLC continuum and focusing on the perception of role of the principal in PLCs. Participants also completed *The Professional Learning Community Continuum Survey* (See Appendix C). This survey was created by Solution Tree based on *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour et. al., 2006) where clear effective PLC practices are defined. The survey gathered information about individual teacher and participant perceptions of the PLC on a continuum regarding the varied components of PLCs: shared values, trust-building around the work, accountability for administration, structures, and systems, focus on learning, collective inquiry into best practices and current reality, action-oriented, commitment to continuous improvement and results-oriented. This survey gathered baseline information regarding the current PLC practices and helped guide the focus group interview.

The surveys identified the areas that all stakeholders identify as effective professional learning community behaviors and practices currently being implemented within the PLC. Similarities identified assisted in guiding focus group and interview conversations to identify the specific campus practices that contributed to effective professional learning communities specifically in

school culture, purpose, assessment, supporting student needs, focus, professional development, and specifically provided input regarding the role of the campus principal in the development of the PLC.

3.6.4 PLC Observation

The principal and focus group interviews were complemented with observations of the English and Algebra PLC meetings weekly for a month for four observations using *The Professional Learning Community Continuum* and interview and focus group notes to guide the observation while electronically collecting field notes on the actions and interactions of the principal and campus administrators in this setting. The *Professional Learning Community Continuum* was created by Solution Tree based on *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour et. al., 2006) where clear effective PLC practices are defined. Field notes collected were descriptive and reflective to capture the activities observed and reflective notes linked descriptions and actions to themes (Creswell, 2013). I conducted observations as a non-participant observer watching and taking field notes within the PLC meeting (Creswell, 2013). These observations supported the findings from the interviews and focus groups by providing the opportunity to see the actions and interactions in the PLC with the principal and the PLC team. Since observations were conducted in open and public contexts, the field notes did not reflect confidential information about an individual. To further ensure confidentiality, field notes did not contain identifying information.

PLC meetings contained from 4-7 members dependent upon department size. Departments met in one room where multiple PLC meetings could be occurring simultaneously. For example, content grade level such as English I, II, III, and IV would meet in one room. Content specific teachers huddled together to conduct their PLCs. Arriving to these meetings members knew their

roles prior and would come prepared with agendas, data, devices to take notes, sample assignments, tests, and a variety of documentation to address the items previously sent on the agenda.

3.7 Data Analysis

The responses were analyzed to identify themes and develop a “thick description” regarding the principals’ roles, decision making and actions as the professional learning communities develop (Stake, 2000). All data, including field notes from observations, were dis-identified transcribed and analyzed using NVivo12 software. The coding I conducted using NVivo12 included open-coding, process coding, values coding, and deductive coding used towards qualitative data analysis. Process coding is “action coding” and can be used in identifying the actions of the principal in PLC implementation and practice (Saldana, 2016, p 111). Values coding identifies a participant’s values, attitudes, and beliefs and was utilized to better understand the principals’ perspective during PLC implementation and practice (Saldana, 2016). Deductive coding was implemented as the principal functioned as a transformational leader implementing PLC strategies as such pre-existing codes include culture, vision, goal setting, decision-making, and shared leadership (Alvoid, 2014; Lambert, 2005; Marks, 2003; Orr, 2005).

As the interviews, focus group, and observations occurred transcription and analysis were completed to assist me in identifying themes, triangulation, and relevant findings regarding the thinking, decision-making, actions, and role of the administrator in supporting the development of PLCs.

3.8 Delimitations

Although PLCs require teamwork and collaboration this study is intended to better understand the principals' experience and not a study of the role of the varied members of the PLC. Members' roles and experiences may be shared during discussions and guided toward the relevance of the principal to their experience. The study is further delimited to one school, one principal, and two PLC teams who have been effectively implementing these practices.

3.9 Limitations

Potential limitations included limited observation of the principal in the PLC meetings, since during the study the principal experienced a family emergency. Varied assistant principals and leadership staff were observed participating in PLCs in the principal's role in these meetings. PLC implementation occurred over the previous two-year time frame, and it was challenging to capture all the dynamics of implementation. The virtual principal interviews and focus group meeting made it more challenging to observe the physical interactions, body language, and dynamics of individual participants and the group.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Triangulation is the use of multiple sources of data to confirm emerging findings and increase the validity of the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To establish this research as trustworthy, triangulation between the principal interview, focus group interview, and PLC observations identified preliminary findings regarding the roles, decision-making, and actions of the principal in this setting (Stake, 2000). These varied settings gave me the opportunity to hear and see the active participation of the principal in the PLC meeting and confirm the alignment of principal beliefs, actions, and the perceptions of the administrator.

Member checking was used to solicit feedback from participants interviewed to clarify any misunderstanding and to confirm research findings (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016). Member checking was utilized with the campus principal to solicit feedback, confirm preliminary research findings, and to identify any misunderstanding in researcher bias (Merriam, & Tisdell, 2016). The principal did provide feedback and clarification. Member checking was offered with the campus PLC focus group members, but these members did not provide additional responses or feedback.

Furthermore, positionality and reflexivity were implemented to remain mindful of my position and experiences with PLCs (Pillow, 2003). The aim of reflexivity is not to bias the information gathered from my previous experience with the research topic.

3.11 Positionality/Subjectivity Statement

I served as a classroom teacher for 12 years and quickly realized this career was not successful in isolation. I collaborated closely with many mentors, leaders, and individuals who encouraged my growth as a teacher and supported my work to improve student achievement. This profession requires a "growth mindset" and I would have to continually work to refine my instructional practices to best meet my student's academic needs. As I pursued knowledge, I created networks and soon I was learning and mentoring others. In my pursuit to be the best classroom teacher, I returned to university to work on a master's degree as an Instructional Specialist. As an instructional coach, I enjoyed serving and assisting teachers and still had many opportunities to work with many students with a variety of needs through tutoring and intervention. Encouraged by my colleagues, I completed my administrative certification and soon became an administrator. During the experience of administration, I also had the opportunity to serve as a central office administrator serving as Coordinator of Improvement

Planning working with campus and district personnel regarding the development of needs assessments and improvement plans.

The principalship is often embarked upon by individuals who are motivated by the work and the possibility to contribute to the growth and success of a campus. I served as a campus administrator to include the principalship and as an assistant principal (under a seasoned principal of 17 years and a first-year principal). This is not a shift in role one should take blindly and will be a challenging transition. In preparation, an aspiring administrator should understand this role from theory, research, and practice perspectives. Education is a continuous growth process to identify strategies and to implement practices that contribute to the academic gains of students and improved instruction for teachers. In my experience, administrators are impactful transformational leaders on campus. The principal bridges a gap from compliance to change. Being reflective in the thinking and decision-making process is relevant to success.

Current literature and research address the role of the principal as a careful balance of building manager and instructional leader (Marks & Printy, 2003). As an instructional leader, there is a current movement towards transformational leadership. As a transformational leader, the research supports the need for a united campus culture and the building of organizational capacity. The Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a strategy frequently used to support transformation.

A campus principal has the opportunity to make an impact on student achievement and teacher's professional growth through the framework of transformational leadership and the PLC. To meet these ends intentional planning and action are required by the principal beginning with creating a shared campus culture. This culture will be reflective of the values, priorities, and mission of the campus. The culture can contribute to an environment that fosters regular

communication, teaming and is respectful and accommodating to the diverse needs of a community. As a result, the dialogue and planning raise the organizational capacity and commitment.

During my teaching and coaching years, PLC times were common, but I had experienced a variety of different activities and uses of this time. Some PLCs seemed more informational to provide and review upcoming campus events and expectations, some seemed more like a time of debate between teachers and leaders, and some were beginning data analysis and having some discussions regarding instructional strategies. As a principal with my leadership team, we were responsible for implementing and developing PLC practices. I began with a book study on *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities at work* (DuFour & DuFour, 2013) to align the approach to PLC where we systematically reviewed assessment data, instructional strategies, intervention, and enrichment with the unified goal to ensure student growth and achievement and improve instruction. Led by a book study the system is comprehensible, but there is a mindset needed to accomplish such a challenging task. It was not a practice a principal could accomplish independently but was the responsibility of the principal to spearhead, develop, and move to support teachers and students. This implementation required time, reflection, and feedback, and in my experience, some groups of teachers were more successful than others.

Extensive research has been gathered regarding the components and practices of effective PLCs that are making student achievement gains and improving instructional practices. However, having served as a campus administrator I am well aware that it is more than a practice and compliance to make a PLC more than a meeting, but a change agent. There is a shared experience to the process and progress of administrators in PLC development.

3.12 Contributions

Cumulatively the research may support previous findings and identify specific actions and steps beyond these findings and local district expectations a principal can take to support the process of implementing effective professional learning communities (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016; Christiansen, & Robey, 2015; Morrissey, 2000; Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, & Dutton, 2012; Servais, Derrington, & Sanders, 2009). This study adds to the extensive research on professional learning communities with a focus on the role and mindset of the campus principal in building successful PLCs. The benefits are the information and data available to share with new principals and current principals regarding the implementation practices of professional learning communities and the approaches to building a transformative culture and community. The research also identifies ways to overcome the challenges that change can bring.

Future research implications can be the different approaches to transformational leadership and PLC implementation for a new principal vs. an experienced principal and further qualitative studies can consider these factors to benefit the research.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The following sections provide the data collected in the principal interviews, PLC observations, and the focus group discussion aligned to the administrators' beliefs and approaches, actions, and decisions supporting the development of the PLC and the perceptions of the team members regarding administration in this process.

This study seeks to better understand the role and responsibility of the principal in the Professional Learning Community meetings. This chapter presents the qualitative results of the study to address the following research questions:

- Research Question 1: As an administrator what beliefs and approaches are most beneficial to support PLC implementation?
- Research Question 2: What are the actions and decisions of administrators, who support the development of cultures of collaboration, improved instructional practices and student achievement within PLC groups?
- Research Question 3: How does the perceptions of the PLC team members of the administrator influence the PLC practices, collaboration, and effectiveness?

This study is guided by the principles grounded in Transformational Leadership and Shared Leadership. Transformational Leadership is the leadership style that fundamentally aims to foster capacity development and higher levels of personal commitment to organizational goals resulting in extra effort and greater productivity (Leithwood, 1999). Through the transformation process shared leadership develops distributing leadership responsibility, such that people within the team guide and lead each other while the leader maintains their role and authority (Wilhelm, 2013).

Prior to conducting the study, artifacts reviewed were STAAR End of Course (EOC) Scores which showed improvement across content areas and more significantly in subpopulations. Although these scores did show improvement from previous years these scores were difficult to use as determining factors of success seeing that the last assessment measures had been taken in 2018-2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. District unit assessments showed recent continued student progress especially in targeted subpopulations as observed in a Data Learning report for Algebra I where the second marking period nine-week assessment showed the overall campus performing at 73% and the English Learner (EL) population performing at 79%. Meeting agendas and notes reflected the PLC framework which included member sign-in, agendas, PLC instructional question framework, next steps, and varied roles for the members such as notetaker, data gatherer, timekeeper, and facilitator which requires the input of all members of the collaborative PLC team.

The campus PLC composition of collaborative teams with varied members focused on student achievement was consistently evident in the PLC observations, focus group discussion and principal interview responses. The campus has a Guiding Coalition that consists of administrators, instructional coaches, and department/team leads. The Guiding Coalition meets bi-weekly and works together to make decisions regarding campus practice and protocols focusing on instructional practices and improved student achievement. Each department/team lead is then responsible for the dissemination of information in each department and for monitoring the implementation of campus initiatives and instructional plans. In addition to the department/team leads that work with each PLC department/team is comprised of several members who teach the same subject at the same grade level and have distinct roles in the PLC meeting such as data disaggregation, note taker, timekeeper, and facilitator.

4.2 Administrators' beliefs and approaches to implement PLCs

The principal interviews and PLC observations found the importance of aligned training in the implementation of PLC practices, the value of shared leadership where administrators and teachers collaborate and make decisions building cultural responsibility and the importance of celebrating the successes along the journey of implementation.

4.2.1 Principal Training Preparation

Ms. Ericsson (pseudonym chosen by the principal) shared that her beliefs and approach were based on book studies such as the study of Learning by Doing by DuFour, Solution Tree trainings, and most influential was a visit to Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois where the work of DuFour originated and transformed an entire community into a united professional learning community. Solution Tree is a company established in 1998 that provides research-based professional learning products and services implementing unique, customized solutions with proven results to improve student learning. Relevant to this study specifically Solution Tree provides professional development entitled *PLC at Work* to support campus PLC practices based on the research of Richard DuFour. Ms. Ericsson has carried the Learning by Doing book study, Solution Tree trainings, and classroom visits at Adlai Stevenson High School with her and shares these experiences with her faculty and staff by telling them about them and more importantly providing opportunities for them to have these same experiences. While serving in her current position as principal Ms. Ericsson has shared these professional development training practices while mentoring her assistant principals and has successfully supported six assistant principals (AP) to go on to be principals and one to serve at the regional service center.

4.2.2 Shared leadership

Ms. Ericsson consistently emphasized the importance of taking on a shared leadership approach with the staff to support and empower teacher participation. She is the lead member of the campus Guiding Coalition and oversees the English department which is under the need for targeted support by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). In this setting, Ms. Ericsson explained that she does not impose her authority but participates by actively listening and asking “seed” questions requiring teachers to be reflective of their practice, make instructional decisions, and share in the leadership responsibility of improved student achievement. In addition, supporting PLC practices, Ms. Ericsson participated in campus instructional rounds with members of the Guiding Coalition to align expectations and in turn instructional practices generating ownership of schoolwide student outcomes. Teachers are provided opportunities to share leadership in decision-making opportunities such as developing effective instructional and assessment timelines, planning for instruction and differentiation, and collaborating closely with other teams and campus-wide personnel to support the campus mission and vision.

In the PLC meetings, the principal and assistant principals were observed serving in the same roles in different PLC meetings due to the multiple PLCs occurring consecutively on the campus. During these observations, the principal also took time off for personal needs. In these meetings the agendas were developed collaboratively between the overseeing administrator, instructional coach, and team leader. During a meeting observation, guidance was provided by Mr. Marcus, instructional coach, sitting in place of the principal; authority was shared with the team lead as evident when Mr. Marcus was talking, stopped, and said, “I am going to let the reins go” directing the team lead to continue to facilitate the meeting. Later, the team which contained several new members were discussing ways to calibrate the writing scores of an Open-Ended

Response (OER) assessment. As Mr. Marcus was listening suggestions were offered and questions were asked to the team regarding the calibration, team members began to question how the process would be facilitated, the administrator provided options and the discussion continued, yet Mr. Marcus concluded with, “Ideally, I mean, these are questions [to be addressed and decided upon by the team], we don’t make demands.”

During this meeting, it was also concerning to the team the number of assessments required of students during this brief time (two weeks before winter break) and ending the first semester. After the discussion and sharing of concerns, the district required assessments could not be changed but Mr. Marcus offered to pull students out of elective classes to help get testing completed or to keep them after school if necessary.

Team leads were observed running the data analysis portion of the meeting for the three-, six- and nine-week benchmark assessments and guiding the team in identifying questions students did not perform well on. After identifying the questions, the team used data in Eduphoria (testing platform) to identify the targeted TEKs being evaluated. Next, the team looked at the assessment to identify the types of errors made by the students and identify specific skills and resources used for intervention and reteaching. All of this information is gathered and finalized on a Data Learning Report and shared with the team. When looking at specific questions students did not perform well on Ms. Ericsson posed guiding “seed” questions such as,

“You had to think about (the) author's purpose, what would you be teaching. If I say here's a test break this down using a thinking map to generate, what am I being told and why am I being told this? Because that is basically what we are breaking down. What are the main ideas? Why am I being told this? What is the author's bias? Right. I am not saying there's an immediate answer going to bring this down but what are some tools?”

With these questions team members needed to identify the targeted concept students are struggling with which was ‘authors purpose’ and strategies to support students in understanding and identifying ‘author’s purpose.’ Ms. Ericsson referred to Thinking Maps as this instructional tool was being implemented on the campus this year.

Also, in PLCs teachers were provided flexibility with the calendar to modify instructional delivery days and assessment timelines to as Ms. Ericson said, “better suit the kid’s needs.”

Shared leadership between administration and teachers was evident in aligned training and observed in PLC practices regarding daily instructional decisions and assessments.

4.2.2.1 Collaboration

Ms. Ericsson stated that a key element to shared leadership is collaboration, but “collaboration does not always come easily.” In collaboration, she says, “I think I’m very collaborative and I try to be transparent, and if I’m going to say no, I’m going to tell you why.” Collaboration is key between the multiple teams such as administration, the Guiding Coalition, departments, and within each of the PLC teams. For example, departments can collaborate to develop one lesson plan if the required Thinking Map, graphic organizers rolled out this school year as a campus-wide initiative, is incorporated into the lesson. Ms. Ericsson then holds teachers accountable for that agreed-upon collaborative lesson. Another critical collaborative decision made was the restructuring of the Special Education (SPED) teachers’ daily instructional responsibilities. Most frequently SPED teachers are assigned to the type of service provided such as inclusion, pull-out/resource, and co-teach. At Jamestown high school, the principal restructured SPED teachers to work by content area and to support SPED students in that content area in the different settings of instruction (resource, co-teach, inclusion). Ms. Ericsson explained that the expectation is that in PLCs SPED and general education teachers will

build strong content knowledge and use evidence about student performance as the center of structured dialogue. This will help all teachers to make decisions about how to improve instructional practices and take actions in the classroom that lead to new heights of achievement for learners.

Ms. Ericsson most frequently experienced challenges to collaboration with more experienced teachers who were more accustomed to working independently and want to do “the same thing from year to year.” She found teachers may also question autonomy in teaching lessons to which her response is, “None of the short cycle questions (questions asked during PLCs) ask how you are going to teach this, so teachers still have that autonomy. [In PLC] They share what they are actually doing in the lesson,” but still have the freedom to conduct the lesson as they choose to.

When teachers, “are compliant, but not invested” Ms. Ericsson will have them visit other classrooms with teachers who are utilizing the collaborative meetings to transform instruction and then reflect on how this can support their practice relying on the visual experience to open their perspective toward collaboration and the PLC.

Collaboration in the PLC meeting was observed between teams of teachers, instructional support personnel, and administrators. Types of collaborative practices included English teachers sharing concerns with the writing calibration process and the English department team lead responded that, “the idea is not to get it right, it’s just about the talking;” they were referring to having conversations about what is required for each piece of writing to be scored at each level.

As a team completed a “data dig,” the review of a multiple-choice assessment and responses students struggled with, a teacher in the English PLC meeting shared that, “I was thinking, well, one, the title is very helpful. So, it is...returning to the basics of about prereading,

looking at a title, looking at these (captions), you know, these kinds of things” referencing the best practices in reading instruction to benefit students and review with teachers.

These collaborative conversations also led to a discussion led by a team lead about “teaching well versus testing well.” Specifically, “teaching well” strategies tied back to the required Thinking Map utilization implemented as a campus wide initiative. The conclusion to this conversation with guidance from Mr. Marcus, instructional coach, emphasized the importance of daily instruction alignment to assessment because students will, “play the way they practice.”

During PLC lesson planning, as one team was observed planning the modified instructional calendar considering instructional days, early release/late arrival days, and assessments, a teacher asked a more experienced teacher if a particular lesson was going to be able to be completed on a shorter day. The experienced teacher explained the lesson and how the time frame would be feasible. Teachers also discussed different strategies to complete a problem including calculator strategies. Through collaborative efforts, instructional coaches also assisted to ensure that student devices were up to date for online testing and developed schedules to visit each class to support these efforts. Team leads consistently provided opportunities for follow-up questions. The collaborative teaming efforts and interdependency were evident in all PLC observations. Collaboration with all team members in all settings is critical to successful PLCs. Collaboration is used to share knowledge, make instructional decisions, offer opportunities for reflection, and share instructional practices.

All focus group members agreed that PLC teams need to be incredibly collaborative and interdependent of one another where all members contribute to lesson planning, lesson creating (as far as the actual what happens in the classroom), and data analysis. Mr. Marcus described

interdependence as the belief that each member “really needs” the other members to, “make everything work full circle.” Ms. Yolie, instructional coach shared that, “When many hands help with the work, it’s truly for the kids.” This process assures, “that the kids get absolutely what they need.”

4.2.2.2 Decision making

Ms. Ericsson finds that through the shared leadership approach PLC practices require the teachers to follow the short cycle to make instructional decisions. The short cycle consists of asking four guiding questions:

- 1) What do we want our students to know and learn?
- 2) How are we going to know if they learned it?
- 3) What are we going to do if they didn’t?
- 4) What are we going to do if they already go it?

In each stage of the cycle, teachers are reflective of student results and make decisions regarding the results achieved. In addition, teachers are never told how to teach something but have the autonomy and decision-making power in their daily instructional approach. For example, when addressing the question: What are we going to do if they don’t get it? Based on the percentage of students who did not grasp a concept teachers can choose to re-teach, spiral, pullout, review as a bell ringer/closing task, ultimately teachers decided what they need to do to ensure students understand the essential knowledge and skill.

Further supporting this decision-making responsibility, teachers who are team leads serve on the “Deep PLCs” which are being implemented at the district level. During these meetings, teachers explained that they can participate in discussions with district personnel regarding instructional plans, timelines, assessments, and diverse topics to help district personnel have a

clearer idea of what is happening at the campus and provide input and suggestions. Input from the campuses is taken into consideration to help guide supportive decision-making at the district level. Ms. Ericsson explained that this process is new and in development, especially in building relationships of shared decision making but was pleased that the conversations and planning had started.

In an English department PLC observation, as the team was preparing to analyze data, some student scores were missing the Open-Ended Response (OER) scores which posed a concern and led to a discussion regarding the alignment across the team of scoring written responses. To address these concerns Mr. Marcus, instructional coach, proposed to reaggregate scores without the OER, “depending on how helpful the team thinks that would be.” Teachers decided that grades for OER would not be entered until calibration. Teacher discussion further led to the concern of the alignment of the 0-2 district rubric with the STAAR 0-4 rubrics used to score students’ OER writing.

In a Mathematics PLC observation, as the first semester and the testing time frame were ending, teachers verbalized, “I cannot afford to not give my lesson (due to current testing schedules).” Teachers had concerns with the instructional time frame and testing due dates. The team lead shared, “It’s going to go back to the teams and what they want...whatever fits your schedule and what you can see.” This team decided to postpone the OER to a later date having students complete the OER and multiple-choice assessments on the same day. Teams of teachers were frequently seen changing the instructional calendar days based upon students’ needs and campus events while administration allowed for these changes as “experts” in their instructional settings yet still held them accountable for curriculum through the daily lesson plan and student achievement.

PLCs gave teams the opportunity to discuss assessment results, timelines, grading practices, and instructional practices and make team and individual decisions.

Ms. Susy and Ms. Beatriz, teachers in the focus group agreed that the PLC setting is where the team looks at the calendar and can make the necessary adjustments depending on how students are performing. Decisions can then be made regarding pacing, varied instructional strategies, and whole group versus targeted student re-teach.

4.2.3 Cultural Responsibility

When asked about the relevance of the campus culture to the work of the PLC Ms. Ericsson emphasized the importance of collaboration and team building and said that the campus vision and mission are essential elements in setting the campus culture; in this regard, she said,

“What is it that is lived and breathed on your campus? The campus vision and mission are focused around students and ironically, it’s not based on academics, even though that’s part of it, but them (students) becoming productive members of society.”

She then continued by sharing the campus mission and vision:

Campus Mission Statement

Jamestown’s mission is to engage all students and motivate them to be productive problem-solving members of society.

Campus Vision Statement

Jamestown’s vision is to create a safe, supportive, interactive, and fun learning environment for all students.

“So, it has to be something that it’s a way of life and it’s ingrained in everything that we do, and it needs to run, whether you’re (the principal) in the room or not. Because if it only runs in the room, if the principal is there, then you truly do not have a collaborative

team. You do not have a collaborative spirit. It has to translate to what's going on in the classroom, in observations, walkthroughs, and then celebrations. We're going to do it together. Either we're going to succeed together or we're going to fail together."

Ms. Ericsson stated that PLC meeting expectations include mutual respect, arriving on time, being prepared, and having honest conversations; she said this is what contributes to the campus collaborative culture. During the interviews and observations, Ms. Ericsson shared the passing of a loved one and while she was out tending to these personal needs the campus continued to follow the collaborative team expectations, classroom visits, district expectations and she reported "they're not missing a beat". For example, as English teachers were discussing the need to calibrate grading practices of essays and the process for this calibration, the teacher lead shared, "Because this is as much about us (aligned grading practices) as it is about the kids' scores (consistent grading practices). It's a meeting of the minds as far as each level (score) of an essay." Teachers were working towards a common goal. Ms. Ericsson shared,

"So, there's a lot of different things that are going on, and I think one of the important things is having that clarity (mission, vision, goals, and how PLC practices support this). I think that we struggled because early on we didn't have that clarity and it took me sending (to Solution Tree training) those groups of individuals (guiding coalition, team leads, instructional support personnel) that I shared with you before for them to understand. And even in summer, we did a virtual one (training and observation), and I had about five teachers that have not been team leads attend. And even then, they were like, Oh, I get it, I get it."

Ms. Ericsson emphasized the importance of building the vision together with the faculty and staff and shared that they revisit this at the beginning of each year. She also shared that current climate surveys report camaraderie among the faculty and staff at its strongest point.

In PLC meetings, teams of teachers with the support of instructional personnel and administration consistently strived to discuss and develop instructional practices. One team was preparing to present their writing calibration practice at a central office meeting for the entire district to showcase their alignment practice but more importantly to, “show the benefits of being in one step” the value of having a united team, instructional support, and shared culture. In PLC meetings the value of each member’s time was always recognized, respected, and appreciated in each setting as each meeting began and ended on time and concluded with, “Honoring your time have a great day!” contributing to a united respectful culture.

Building a collaborative and interdependent PLC requires, as expressed by focus group members, “leaving the ego behind” and a willingness to share everything respectfully and united. This united focused PLC community requires maintenance and daily practice, and with new people and personnel changes, there is always some new obstacle to overcome.

4.2.3.1 Coaching

In collaborative team meetings, Ms. Ericsson shared she has the opportunity to coach teachers. When reviewing data, “if a class is outperforming other classes, we ask those teachers what they are doing, how are they getting there, and finally can we mimic this (in the other class settings)?” Then she and the instructional coaches spend time meeting with the teachers with lower-performing students to support their instructional practices and professional growth.

In a PLC meeting, the team lead also shared that after a recent district walkthrough there would be a required update to the 90-minute math model, and further training would be provided providing team leads with the opportunity to coach teachers with these practices.

These coaching opportunities tie the work of the PLC to classroom instruction with support and guidance from the members of the C&I team. It provides teachers opportunities to improve practice and student outcomes with support, resources, and feedback and contributes to a collaborative unified culture.

4.2.3.2 Relationships

In building a campus unified culture, as teachers enter the PLC meeting, the administrator takes the time to ask teachers how their families were doing specifically health-wise because teachers had been absent due to family medical concerns. The members of each team genuinely cared for one another, gifting one another, sharing potlucks, checking on personal matters such as pregnancies and life events. It was small acts of kindness and care such as these that also contributed to a unified culture.

The relationships amongst the members of the PLC are varied such as department members, teacher-administration, and teacher-instructional coach. There is a respect for each person as well as a respect for role and authority. Mr. Marcus, instructional coach shared in the focus group:

One of the things that was essential to me that was obvious as far as a PLC goes, is just the fundamental respect for other people and the interest in other people having an equity stake in whatever the team does and being willing to sacrifice your own ego or your own desires, or the way you do things on a regular basis in the interest of doing it together.

It is the belief that everyone adds their own strengths to the mix and in so doing, “a better team yields better student outcomes.” These relationships require active listening and full engagement and were described as, “beautiful when we get there.”

Building these PLC working relationships also required daily communication outside of the PLC meeting to ensure that what was discussed and agreed upon was being accomplished. Daily communication built deeper and stronger interdependent ties. Ms. Susy, English team lead said during the focus group,

“And if we don't hear from someone, we reach out to ask, Are you OK? Is everything all right? You know, we check on each other not just for academics, but also...just how's it going kind of situation. So that every team member feels valued and appreciated for their contribution. And when we feel supported and we feel valued as part of this team, then that does reflect in our behavior and interaction with our own students... our team is someone that we can vent to and feel better.”

The relationship with the principal and the entire administrative team was described similarly and appreciated because this information or advice about the expectations and instruction is the “absolute” for the campus.

4.2.3.3 Celebrations

Taking time to recognize and celebrate accomplishments also contributed to culture building. Ms. Ericsson shared that in the weekly campus newsletter, teams and individuals were recognized for outstanding achievement in teaming or individual instructional accomplishments. This practice is intended to recognize and honor the work the teachers were putting into PLC practices and their daily instructional classroom practice.

Ms. Ericsson's newsletter celebrations flowed into the PLC setting, during a Mathematics PLC observation a teacher shared that more of her students were "finally" attending tutoring and she was using group work strategies with them. The teacher reported that this targeted support and intervention resulted in more students completing their work and improving their grades. The other team members honored her effort and shared encouraging words with her. In the focus group, Ms. Susy, English team lead shared that her team calls themselves "Team Awesome," and with this nickname, they try to live up to it in everything they do. Each member has their superhero nickname and she expressed that it is little things like this that spill over into our work in the classroom with students. In these settings administrators always acknowledged and praised each teams' efforts.

Through varied celebrations and praises recognizing the various accomplishments the culture of Jamestown HS continued to be united and encouraged to continue the work they were doing.

4.2.4 Human Capital

In building a campus-wide culture that grows teachers and improves student achievement, it was evident that Ms. Ericsson made decisions to empower teachers' professional practices. Ms. Ericsson shared that "high flying" teams have a lot to do with personality concerning their positive approaches to PLCs, professional development, and growth mindsets in turn help build their skill sets.

During the observation of a PLC, teachers were observed discussing course expectations, relying on one another's experience, and understanding to help guide instructional practices. For instance, in an Algebra I PLC a teacher who previously taught Algebra II asked the experienced Algebra I teacher if a concept was taught in this course because it is in the other more advanced

course. The experienced Algebra I teacher shared that the concept is taught, but at a simpler level of problem-solving and they reviewed some problems. The new teacher to this team then explained how important it was for students to master this foundational Algebra I skill to assist them with future coursework. After assessments were given, “Data Digs” was another opportunity where PLC teams identified TEKS students struggled with, analyzed questions, shared new, and varied instructional practices to build each teacher’s knowledge and skill set.

Practices at Jamestown HS showed that building teachers’ knowledge and skill set were important daily practices that in turn helped student outcomes. Investments in training and PLC time built human capital.

4.3 Administrators Actions and Decisions

In this section, results are presented related to the actions and decisions of administrators in supporting the development of cultures of collaboration, improvement of instructional practices and student achievement within PLC groups.

4.3.1 Time

To make these collaborative team meetings possible, Ms. Ericsson explains,

“One of the things that you must start with is building time for them to meet, right? Not after school, too bad use your conference, no the conference is for them to do the things that they need to do, which is a lot. Collaborative team is specifically for that.”

This required modification of the school-wide bell schedule prioritizing this time for teachers to work and learn together began by developing a campus-wide schedule where every teacher has first period as collaborative time.

Time is a continuous critical factor to making the PLC meetings possible and carrying this work into the classroom to impact student outcomes. The urgency and concern of teachers’

time was evident in PLC discussions where teachers voiced concern of time left ending the first semester and needing to teach specific lessons while having students complete the required testing. Teachers were provided testing windows to meet individual class needs such as extended lesson time and other campus activities such as library visits, counselor visits, and supporting make up work for students who have been absent. They discussed ways to meet these ends such as before and after school, pulling students from other non-tested classes and providing assistance from the C&I team. In the English department PLC members discussed and made instructional decisions to combine content to align themselves with district pacing. In respect and honor of teacher's time administration reminds teachers to "clock in" the time used to assist students outside of the regular work schedule for monetary compensation.

Ms. Beatriz, teacher, also shared during the focus group that at times she personally had difficulty with the willingness to make this weekly time with "all they have on their plates." At times before attending meetings she might think and feel like there were other more important things that could be done with their time. Yet, after attending the PLC meeting, she always found value to their instructional practices and student outcomes in the time shared with the PLC team.

4.3.2 PLC Practices

At the beginning of each school year, Ms. Ericsson requires each team to develop team goals and to review progress frequently consistently working towards these common goals.

Each PLC team follows the PLC short cycle. The teams also follow the district provided pacing guides which provide units of study in bundled sets of TEKs, but Ms. Ericsson also shared that these pacing guides are overloaded with content and multiple TEKS and explains, "there's no way we're going to get through all the pacing guides." She has her teams work collaboratively to develop a targeted campus pacing guide focused on what are the essential

ideas or TEKs that need to be focused on and how much time is going to be spent on each. Ms. Ericsson describes her role in the PLC as, “You need to be the support. You let them run their meetings, but you're there as a support and as a guide for those things that they might need.”

Each PLC meeting has an agenda set for their meetings. They consistently focus on the short cycle of instruction:

1. What do students need to know/learn?
2. How will we know if they learned it?
3. What are we going to do if they didn't?
4. What are we going to do if they already go it?

Throughout the year, in each meeting, the teams go through this cycle of questions.

During an English department PLC meeting, Ms. Ericsson explained the team was, “looking at the kids’ work and those artifacts” asking, “What is it that they're writing? What is it they're saying? Where are they missing it? Is the content there?... Where is the thesis statement and how did they (students) support it?”

During another meeting, when working on question 2 of the short cycle: How will we know if they (students) have learned it? the Algebra teachers responded in a group discussion by using data from the multiple-choice test and the guidance provided to them by Ms. Ericsson was asking how that data would be analyzed to make instructional decisions. When addressing question 3: How will we respond if they don't learn? The team responded, “That one is tricky because it's like the one we did last time saying, look, we don't know how to help if we don't know which one the student is struggling on so we have to wait until we see the assessment results so just put plan to spiral in future units of study.” Ms. Ericsson’s responded that they should have an idea as daily instruction and closing tasks can give teachers ideas of what

students are struggling with and then teachers should be thinking about other ways to teach the content not waiting solely on assessment results.

PLC practices follow the short cycle where lesson planning, differentiation, and timelines are reviewed, and instructional decisions are made as well as the analysis of assessment data. These practices are recurring and consistent throughout the years' campus and district pacing guides.

Findings from the focus group indicated that PLCs and the short cycle were cyclical usually in a three-week period. Teams used the PLC agenda planner and Data Learning Report as the documentation pieces for these meetings which contributed to meeting focus, consistent campus practices, and accountability. Team leads develop and distribute via email meeting agendas based on the short cycle and assessment before the meetings with input from instructional coaches and administrators. In a meeting regarding daily instruction and lessons, discussion can occur regarding student understanding, pacing, artifacts, intervention, and enrichment.

While observing PLC meetings, there was evidence showing parallels between action research and teachers' practices and actions reviewing and discussing the assessment cycle: administer the assessment, analyze data, identify targeted areas of student need and plan supports while continuing to follow the pacing guide. Ms. Ericsson stated that the PLC short cycle is action research guided by questions: What are we going to teach? And what will we do when they don't learn it?

This recurrent process contributes to a consistent common practice and supports the culture of teacher and student growth and success.

All focus group members agreed that PLCs are a process that requires training, support, and monitoring to ensure reliable and valid implementation and sustainable practice.

4.3.3 Roles

The campus has a guiding coalition called “C&I” which consists of all administrators, department chairs, instructional coaches, a counselor, program coordinators, and librarians. Ms. Ericsson runs the C&I collaborative meetings in the same way as PLCs and refers to this team as the campus “think tank.” Members of the C&I, “turn it (the campus-wide decisions and next steps) around for their departments.”

Based on the members of each team observed, there was a team lead (one classroom teacher appointed by the principal) who usually carried the role of facilitator, a recorder, and a data gatherer (this role was a shared responsibility dependent upon who had access to data as instructional coaches generally had more access to all of the department data). At the beginning of each year, each team set up their goals and agreed on how they are going to keep each other accountable for reaching these goals. The team lead/facilitator ensured that each team member was fulfilling their role. Instructional support personnel and administrators are also assigned to PLC teams, these members are required to participate in PLCs and complete a minimum of five walkthroughs a week to support the connection between PLC practices, classroom practices, and student outcomes.

All focus group members agreed that members of the PLC team have varied roles that contribute to everyone, in the end being on the same footing. The team lead/facilitator develops the agenda in conjunction with the instructional support personnel and administration and is responsible during the meeting for keeping the meeting on track. The data gatherer makes sure the data is collected before the meeting and completes the data learning report during the

meeting. The recorder takes minutes during the meeting and shares these with the team after the meeting to comply with the next steps.

4.3.3.1 Instructional leader

Ms. Ericsson explains that as an instructional leader, “regarding the creation of the PLC, the principal plays a key role because you have to put those structures in place, set those expectations, and explain why we’re doing it.”

During PLC meetings there was consistent evidence that administrators, instructional coaches, and teachers all needed to be instructionally knowledgeable to contribute to the PLC conversations. As the English team was attempting to analyze data Mr. Marcus, instructional coach, was concerned with the limited number of responses in Eduphoria (data collection software); after discussion, the team realizes the new teachers were not aware of this expectation and process. Mr. Marcus acknowledged this and told the new teachers time will be made to go back and teach them how to use Eduphoria. Mr. Marcus also shared a concern with district assessment and alignment to state assessment specifically regarding the writing rubric and shares that the concern had been shared with central office administration. Furthermore, he shared that the written response will be required of students on the state assessment and the team will need to proceed with a plan to make data for the district assessment “useful” for planning for students’ performance on the state assessment.

During another PLC observation discussion was held regarding students’ written responses being developed in Writeable (an online writing software) and copied and pasted into Eduphoria (testing site). Some teachers were concerned with this 2-step process. Mr. Marcus acknowledged the drawback to *Writeable* having no character limit where Eduphoria and STAAR have these limits and explains that this process will need to be explicitly explained to

students to ensure the composition meets character limitations without missing meaning in the piece. Mr. Marcus further explained that the benefit to *Writable* is that it has an organizer, language supports, and an originality check. Using this software ensures students received all supports and if they are not successful this will also identify instructional “breakdown” for students. In conclusion, Mr. Marcus acknowledges that there may be cases where this practice is not best for students and a paper-pencil assessment will need to be utilized and explains that this will need to be addressed and decided upon on an individual basis.

Regarding the writing pieces the team needs to calibrate the written responses and Mr. Marcus communicates a plan and process for calibration, “Students will complete written response in *Writable*, copy and paste into Eduphoria, teachers will review their response looking for samples of a 1, 2, 3, and 4 aligned to the STAAR rubric, teachers will attend a meeting with these responses and work cooperatively to review each other’s student responses with the goal to calibrate (ensure grading alignment across the department)’. After communicating this plan, it was open for discussion giving the team the opportunity to ask questions and provide input.

In reviewing an English multiple-choice assessment, the lead teacher pointed out that multiple questions address one TEK, but “to different effects.” The administrator praised the team for the team doing well with analyzing context and distinguishing annotation context and proceeded to address the struggle with inferencing. Furthermore, it was shared that students performed well with “denotative and connotative meanings from context which is also inferencing” and teachers were guided to analyze the different inferencing questions and skills students struggled with. This led the team to then review the actual exam to have a more in depth understanding of how the content would be addressed. Mr. Marcus, the instructional coach, guides teachers by asking what the author’s purpose was and with this text which Thinking Map

could students use to better understand the piece of text and answer these questions. The team was further challenged when Mr. Marcus asked: “They (students) didn't grasp the content enough to properly answer the question. Is that accurate? Or were they just literally skimming? Just trying to use test-taking skills to answer the multiple-choice (questions). Not really reading.” After discussion, the team agreed to return students to pre-reading and post-reading skills such as main idea and annotation will support students in answering inferencing questions.

In all these observations and discussions, each member of the team needed to have a strong instructional knowledge to support these conversations, planning, student growth, and achievement.

4.3.4 Communication

While in the actual PLC meeting, Ms. Ericsson is careful not to be the center of the conversation. Furthermore, she shared, “I'm the last to speak because what I have found is that if I say something, then everybody is going to agree with me. And that's not what I want. I want the conversation to happen so I can see where they're coming from (to provide guidance and support).”

Ms. Ericsson described communication within the PLC helps teachers be reflective of their practices; she described this as, “we (teachers) can think that we're OK until we see what our neighbors (other teachers) are doing. And if our neighbors are doing much better, then what is it that you (the other teacher) did?” This approach helps to transform practice for student gain.

In communication, Ms. Ericsson explained she is extremely focused and willing to assist with PLC practices and problem-solving. When a teacher has a concern or issue, they can come and talk to her, but she does ask them to come up with two possible solutions (to their concern or issue) and if it (the solution) is feasible, it will “absolutely” get done, but if it can't, she will let

the team know why it cannot and still offers to find another solution together. She also explained that there are times when these conversations end in disagreement, but the conversation was critical to hearing and understanding varied perspectives and continued programming. She shared that the ultimate goal of these conversations' is, "Yes, here we are, we're going to take care of kids and that's really what the bottom line is."

PLC meetings observed provided the opportunity for teams to communicate regarding varied instructional strategies, campus daily practices and routines, personal matters and contributed to the united interdependent culture of Jamestown HS. During this time teachers were able to ask questions between themselves and gather input from other teachers, instructional support personnel and administration. Teachers ask questions regarding content, pacing, and grading (aligned and final). For example, in one PLC observed teachers expressed the concern of time for instruction, assessment and the additional concern of loss of instructional time due to recently implemented late arrival schedules. After discussion teachers reached out to central office facilitators regarding extending testing timelines due to the loss of instructional time.

Mr. Marcus, commented regarding the district level "Deep PLCs" during the focus group that, "the nature of the exchange (Deep PLC meetings) is top-down (and possibly necessarily) while rooted in data from the bottom up, yet not analyzed from the bottom up". These members are expressing how data at the district level is often reviewed and district-wide decisions can and are made without taking into consideration the voices and the work at the campus level and again substantiates the need for communication in PLCs and communication with central office and campus personnel.

More experienced teachers in the focus group explained how PLC meetings offered the opportunity for new teachers with less experience to ask a lot of questions from how to manage a certain situation to lesson delivery. They also shared that this was an opportunity for the experienced teacher to see things from new eyes which were as Ms. Susy shared, “incredibly insightful and welcomed at every point.” The communication in PLC is intended to build everyone’s willingness to participate in planning, willingness to ask questions, and willingness to ask for assistance. It was all very collaborative because they share the same common goals. When presenting information Ms. Susy, English team lead shared she wanted to ensure the clarity is there for teachers to be able to successfully implement and practice what is being required of them with students. Mr. Marcus, instructional coach added it is also necessary that the communication extends outside of the PLC meeting, “if I wanted to, I could grab my phone right now and I could hit send to the entire team.” He emphasized the importance of having lots of diverse ways to communicate. He continued to share,

“it's a way for us to not only just kind of enjoy each other's company from time to time but also, to communicate things faster or slower or slower in more detail or faster in less detail. And that also allows us to then keep an eye on one another and ensure that all of those anything on our checklist (PLC documentation) was checked off (completed).”

All focus group members agreed that daily communication was necessary and constant.

4.3.5 Strategies

After six years of PLC implementation, Ms. Ericsson explains that the development of the Professional Learning Community is the overarching framework of the entire high school, and the department meetings are referred to as collaborative team meetings. These teams work with the campus C&I members. As an instructional leader, Ms. Ericsson also has the responsibility to

implement research-based instructional practices to support instruction and student achievement. She had the campus complete a book study on *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners* by Ron Ritchart. This book study contributed to instruction by having PLC teams identify “thinking routines and AVID strategies” within their lesson plans which contributed to the planning occurring under question one: What are those strategies? What is it that we are going to do how are we going to assess it? Will it be a verbal response, a written artifact, or an assessment? Ms. Ericsson also discussed with teachers, after a classroom observation, the amount of teacher talk versus the amount of student talk; in addition, she expects that teachers are using Kagan Strategies throughout the lesson as checkpoints for student understanding and to balance the teacher lecture time with student dialogue and checks for understanding.

Teams discussed various strategies during PLC meetings such as planning lab work for classes based on these critical conversations. Teams consistently discussed the importance of the spiral review of concepts previously taught and the importance of this as daily bell ringers or problems of the day. Ms. Susy, English lead teacher expressed the importance of documentation, especially regarding the efforts made to assess students. An English teacher shared the idea of using a backward tree map to help students work backwards when identifying the main idea. Teams discussed the use of thinking maps and the gradual release (I do-we do-you do) in the writing process. Teams discussed the actual use/implementation of a Nearpod lesson and how with some classes some components may take longer than others therefore each teacher will have the autonomy in their respective classes to complete this activity with their students based on student needs and teacher discretion. Teacher autonomy was consistently addressed. When discussing the students who get it (Question 4 of the short cycle) these students could complete

the Nearpod in a self-paced mode on their laptop. Many instructional strategies were reviewed and documented for teachers' future reference. When discussing how the PLC meeting supports instructional strategies and actual lessons in the focus group Ms. Beatriz shared, "it's not necessarily that one lesson was better than another but finding which instructional strategy or best practice is more effective. Not necessarily that one lesson was better than the other."

4.3.5.1 Assessment

Ms. Ericsson strongly believes that assessment is more than a "test" or district-required common assessment. She explained that she expects teams to first identify what needs to be assessed in each lesson and how will this be reflected in daily assignments such as bell ringers, closing tasks, essays, and assignments in Interactive Student Notebooks (ISN). When using common assessments as a measure of student learning, Ms. Ericsson expects teams to use PLC time and communication to review heat maps (data reports that identify low-performing questions and TEKS) and disaggregate data. Approaching assessment practices as more than a test and as varied ways to check student understanding transitioned campus-wide assessment from more than a compliance tool to instruments that guide instruction and intervention.

During PLCs, the need and value of utilizing Eduphoria (data software) is explained as the data resource across the campus for immediate access to current student data and as a comparative resource across years. The Algebra lead teacher walked the team through a "data dig" regarding a recent multiple-choice assessment. During this process data for the campus and targeted populations such as SPED are reviewed. As they identified questions students struggled with, they identified the TEKS aligned to the questions and with further discussion determined it was relevant to the discussion and findings to review the actual test given.

Teams were also observed discussing the relevance of strategies taught such as the use of thinking maps and graphic organizers in writing within the assessment pieces and how to instruct students to carry these skills into the assessment. When students performed low on questions teams identified and discussed the TEK/student learning expectation, reviewed how the question was being asked, and finally had to identify a specific strategy with resources to reteach this low performing question to support student success. For example, in the observation of the Algebra data dig teachers discussed the challenge for students to problem-solve via a laptop without the opportunity to paper-pencil solve a problem, the discussion went on further to discuss the need for graph paper in solving problems. As this discussion continued the team realized that graph paper can be provided to students during the online assessment and agreed that this would be provided to them during instruction and assessments from that point forward. The meetings also allowed teams to review online test-taking skills such as interactive drag and drop responses. Knowing that in the future students would be tested by the state with an embedded constructed response teams added this to their campus assessments. Focus group members agreed that data is discussed every 3-, 6-, and 9-week periods, and each assessment question is broken down by percentages and when students do not perform well the team will develop a way to spiral in the TEK students are struggling with.

4.3.5.2 Curriculum

Regarding curriculum, Ms. Ericsson understands that the state standards are many and can be daunting for teachers to work through and shared the importance of having a viable and manageable curriculum. She says without this teams will not be able to work through the questions in the PLC. Therefore, in staying aligned to team goals and 9-week plans each team can adjust weekly plans and frequently used PLC meetings to do so.

4.3.5.3 Differentiation

A critical component of culture-building was identifying and addressing the varied needs of all stakeholders. During the PLC meetings, the question is consistently asked: What percentage of students are not getting it? What are we doing for those students? On Fridays, Ms. Ericsson has developed a small learning community that spends time outreaching via phone calls, emails, and letters to parents/guardians of struggling students. Through PLCs, Ms. Ericsson also recognizes that teachers need more help and support with Question 4: What are we going to do with the kids that already get it? Teachers often answer this question with the response of peer tutoring or skill practice; Ms. Ericsson feels it is important to think critically about what is instructionally most beneficial for these students.

During the PLCs meeting, I observed planning practices to differentiate for student academic and social-emotional needs, identifying targeted instructional concerns, identifying materials needed, and preparing lessons to meet those needs. Some conversations addressed students' language needs and how this can be met in the instructional settings and assessment. The conversations also addressed the need for the use of physical books for students who were having difficulty using digital books.

During the focus group discussion Ms. Susy, English team lead shared that in PLC meetings assessment and data were only part of the conversation. This was a time to discuss student behavior and the actual ways the students responded to different assignments and differences in class pacing.

4.3.6 Academic Gains

Ms. Ericsson explained the shift of focus from teacher instruction to student learning in the Texas teacher appraisal: Texas Teachers Evaluation and Support System (TTESS)

expectations. She further explained how PLC meetings focused on: What's the learning that is going on with the students? is aligned and supports the teacher evaluation system. She went on to emphasize the importance of PLC teams monitoring progress for the sub-populations on the campus and making instructional gains for these groups of students.

During PLCs, teachers shared that varied instructional strategies, tutoring, and the opportunity for small group instruction showed academic gains and allowed students to “catch up.”

4.3.7 Professional Development

Ms. Ericsson has studied the work of PLCs in literature by Richard DuFour, participated in Solution Tree Trainings and shared that it was in visiting Adlai Stevenson HS that she was, “blessed” with seeing firsthand the work of a turnaround school establishing a professional learning community. This is when she knew this practice could change her campus. She also realized, “We don't have a whole lot of time to waste. We got to jump in there and get it done.” For all administrators, she highly recommends visiting a model school and the power of seeing this in action.

In the implementation of PLCs, Ms. Ericsson began with the book study *Learning by Doing*, by DuFour & DuFour with the campus Assistant Principals (AP) and then had them attend a Solution Tree training and said this is when “it clicked” for the administrative team. Next, she sent campus wide instructional support personnel to Solution Tree training, and again “it clicked.” One member told her this training helped them to see, “what you've been trying to do all these years.” She mentioned that from this training on “it sprouted wings.” Next, she sent team leads and said, “they came back on fire.” Teams were taught how to utilize the short cycle. The following year was when Covid began and this provided some additional challenges to

continued implementation, but despite these obstacles, they continued to develop their processes of PLC.

Ms. Ericsson understood that the work of PLCs needed to be tied to and impact daily classroom instruction and conducts independent walkthroughs and calibration walk-throughs with C&I members, resulting in identifying “glows” and “grows.” “Glows” are identifying instructional practices that can be recognized and celebrated either one on one or campus-wide and “grows” are areas that still need improvement and support. Based on these walkthroughs, the C& I team establishes what is needed regarding professional development and PLC next steps.

Ms. Ericsson continually finds ways to improve her teams’ instructional approaches while ensuring that the implementation of these practices is manageable for teachers and impactful to the instructional setting. In the summer, she had team leads and instructional coaches trained as a trainer of trainers for Thinking Maps to roll out this practice with each team, because data showed students needed those prereading strategies, the reading strategies, and the writing strategies and ways to organize their thinking. Instructional coaches rolled out one Thinking Map a week campus-wide through Social Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons to provide students with ways to organize their thoughts and articulate them through writing. Training has also been provided in Socratic seminars, through philosophical chairs, where students are required to see and approach a question or problem from an unfamiliar perspective. Through these seminars, students are required to provide textual evidence to support their thinking. Identifying student instructional needs and teachers’ instructional practices to support these needs keeps student growth and achievement at the forefront of everything accomplished at Jamestown HS.

During an English PLC, Mr. Marcus, instructional coach was able to provide step-by-step instruction on how to access data in Eduphoria. During this sharing of information, the realization became apparent that not all members were fluent in how to use Eduphoria, and further one on one or small group training was offered.

During the Algebra PLC the team lead shared as a result of district walkthroughs that an instructional update to the 90-minute math model is forthcoming and training would be provided.

With successful PLC implementation and practices the English team had developed a process for calibrating students written essays. As the work was recognized they were given the opportunity to present a district wide professional development on the process of calibrating writing across a department.

4.4 Perceptions of administration

The focus group was gathered to better understand the perceptions of members of PLC practices and most importantly to understand their perceptions of the principal in the implementation and weekly PLC practices. Focus group members included Mr. Marcus who was working as an instructional coach supporting the English department and had been teaching for eight years, previously had worked with a testing publisher, Ms. Susie had been teaching high school English for 23 years and served as the team lead, Ms. Beatriz had been teaching math for four years, and Ms. Yolie who had 13 years of experience as a classroom teacher and instructional coach currently supporting the social studies, math and physical education departments.

Before the focus group discussion all members rated their PLC teams on the Professional Learning Community Continuum and found that in over 90% of their responses focus group members felt that their PLC meetings were in the developing or sustaining stages of PLC

meeting implementation. The four members of this group varied in years of experience from 4-23 years, have served in varying roles such as classroom teacher, instructional coach, and college-level teaching, and participated in varied PLC meetings at both the campus and district levels. Ms. Susy shared the importance of having team members who were really interested in trying to make it work who, “understand the purpose of the collaborative meeting and value that time.”

Ms. Yolie viewed the role of the principal as making sure that the C&I team “bought into” the PLC culture and so they can contribute to the cultural development of the PLC as an expectation that is a best practice. Ms. Yolie continued sharing that Ms. Ericcson is responsible to ensure training is provided. Most importantly Ms. Yolie explained, “she is also responsible for consistently reiterating in actions and decisions that this is the expectation and the norm of the campus.”

They felt that the regular contact and communication between administration, support personnel, and classroom teachers supported shared leadership, shared decision making and a consistent focus on the short cycle. Mr. Marcus shared that administrators and support personnel, “have the opportunity to think about things in a different way, while a classroom teacher may be, just trying to get to the next step and when confronted with that information, especially if it was something where my team and I were trying to head to this path and I was being reminded of some big picture issue that might have changed our way of going,” this was perceived as helpful.

Again, Ms. Susy and Ms. Beatriz, classroom teachers discussed the different perspectives instructional coaches and administrators brought to these meetings and their abilities in moving teams forward to, “keep an eye out for any future obstacles” and shared how this insight was beneficial to each of the teams.

Focus group members shared that they believed that Ms. Ericsson has assigned the administrators to PLC teams by their content area of specialty which is especially important so that they have the knowledge within the content and can participate in the dialogue and answer questions in the PLC. For example, Question 1: What do we want them to know? as far as the curriculum is concerned, these assigned administrators were reported to have that content knowledge. Mr. Marcus shared that administrators come to PLC meetings to support best practices being followed, to support team being on task and productive, to provide big picture understanding, to use their role and title to emphasize mandatory expectations, “especially when we're dealing with things that could otherwise rock a PLC or create a whole lot of a feedback loop that that maybe wouldn't be productive”, and to answer questions team members may have for the administrator. Ms. Susy shared those administrators are also the instructional supervisors for teacher TTESS, their input is not just an administrator giving directives regarding how the school is working, but they are the overseer regarding classroom expectations. All focus group members appreciated administrative input in PLC meetings because they shared that these conversations and administrative input can have immediate and direct input into classroom practices and during classroom walkthroughs bringing the work in PLCs and classroom instructional practices full circle. Ms. Beatriz Focus shared how in the PLC setting administrators had been assigned to PLCs based on their instructional expertise and she admired how these administrators could sit with the team and provide additional instructional strategies and approaches. This made her feel that the administrator was, “putting themselves in the teacher's shoes again.” This time and interaction with administrators made her feel like they (administration) really cared. Ms. Susy shared that this time and practices developed relationships of open communication. All focus group members shared that PLC meetings were a

place to discuss the calendar and find ways to work together to fix instructional and assessment timeline concerns. They felt their assigned administrators were really there to help them the best they could.

Ms. Susy, English team lead, viewed administration like there, “one-stop shop.” The administration is collaborating with them in their PLC team providing input to planning and data analysis, they are the teacher supervisors completing classroom and teacher observation, and they are campus administrators that can clarify anything that needs clarification at both levels. This teaming has built instructional collaborative relationships between the teachers, instructional support personnel, and administrators and at times has grown into more personal relationships developing as observed in that sharing of birthdays, potlucks and simply checking in with one another. Although some conversations may become more personal, they build stronger working relationships yet never cross the line of professionalism and appropriate role and respect for position or authority.

4.5 Learning of members

The focus group members shared that through PLC practices they have learned the value of teaming done right and the value of many hands helping with the work, interdependence, and humility. Most importantly Mr. Marcus shared, “Everything it's truly for the kids. We're here to make sure that the kids get absolutely what they need.”

Advise from focus group members to administrators implementing PLC.

In implementing PLCs focus group members would tell a new principal:

- have a clear vision and expectations
 - communicate this to your leadership team
 - communicate this to your PLC teams

- follow-through
 - with each team's implementation of vision and expectations
- listen to your people,
- do not throw everything at them at once,
- be understanding (relationships)

4.6 Analytical Summary

Ms. Ericsson has transformed Jamestown High School by building campus instructional capacity and increasing educator commitment and productivity demonstrating transformational leadership. After analyzing the information gathered during the principal interviews, PLC observation, and the focus group discussion the following themes were identified in line with the literature review and in addressing the study questions:

- As an administrator what beliefs and approaches are most beneficial to support PLC implementation?
 - Shared leadership, collaboration, decision making, cultural responsibility, and celebrations
- What are the actions and decisions of administrators, who support the development of cultures of collaboration, improved instructional practices and student achievement within PLC groups?
 - Time, PLC practices, roles, instructional leadership, communication, strategies, assessment, and curriculum

Each of these themes was also found prevalent in the focus group discussion.

Through the triangulation of the principal interviews, PLC observations and focus group discussion, I found that shared leadership focused on collaboration and shared decision-making,

builds a strong culture that celebrates team and student success. The honor and value of each member's time, consistent PLC practices to include member roles, instructional leadership, and the discussion of instructional strategies, assessment and curriculum were all key to the implementation of campus PLCs. The principal interview, PLC observations, and focus group discussion found that the support of a campus principal is critical to the PLC meeting implementation. A school-wide mission and vision support PLC practices where shared leadership, collaboration, and decision-making become a team effort. The principal is responsible for building and supporting such a culture and celebrating the milestones of implementation. The principal must build time into the weekly schedule and ensure this time has structured PLC practices with instructional leadership support and communication regarding curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment data analysis. Critical steps a principal can take during implementation include a campus-wide book study, continued professional development training with implementation support, developing aligned instructional practices, and taking the time to focus on differentiated instruction and special populations. Jamestown High School is a professional learning community that continues to improve student achievement and grow teachers' knowledge and skill base.

New findings that emerged during the study included identifying the campus as a Professional Learning Community and the weekly team meetings as collaborative team meetings. The professional learning community is the entire school and collaborative team meetings are department meetings. Ms. Ericsson describes "So it, you know, the collaborative team meetings are just one part of our PLC as a campus, right? Because as I have said, the PLC is the campus itself, not the meeting." When the entire campus is approaching their daily work as a professional learning community, they are consistently being reflective and improving practice

and using the collaborative team meetings as a time to meet with other team members to receive and provide input regarding all campus practices.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

This chapter includes a discussion of the research questions in relation to the literature review and the data reported in Chapter 4. The chapter will begin by reviewing the questions that guided the study. After which, I will present implications of this work for administrators who are implementing PLC practices on a campus. I will conclude this chapter with a summary of the study, as well as opportunities for future work and concluding thoughts.

This study sought to answer these three questions:

- Research Question 1: As an administrator what beliefs and approaches are most beneficial to support PLC implementation?
- Research Question 2: What are the actions and decisions of administrators, who support the development of cultures of collaboration, improved instructional practices and student achievement within PLC groups?
- Research Question 3: How does the perceptions of the PLC team members of the administrator influence the PLC practices, collaboration, and effectiveness?

The principal interviews, PLC observations and focus group discussion were used to better understand the beliefs, approaches, actions, and decisions of principals implementing PLCs and the perceptions of the principal by the PLC members. What follows are the findings to the questions posed and implications for practice.

5.2 Findings

Findings will share specific beliefs, approaches, actions, and decisions made by the administration during the implementation of PLCs and the perceptions of team members regarding the principals' implementation process.

5.2.1 As an administrator what beliefs and approaches are most beneficial to support PLC implementation?

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2019) states that there are three pillars of effective principalship: building culture, empowering people, and optimizing systems which were demonstrated by Ms. Ericsson in this project. In these weekly structured PLC meetings, shared leadership was developed between the teachers, instructional leadership, and the administrators to support effective PLC practices that built a culture to empower teachers in instructional decision-making. An administrator will build shared instructional leadership capacity by connecting learning and leading (Lambert, 2005). This was observed in the observation of PLCs through teacher discussion where teachers were able to learn from one another and their instructional coaches while making instructional decisions regarding lessons, assessment results, and instructional timelines. The study also found that through shared leadership the PLC members at Jamestown HS valued the PLC as a time of collaboration with department members, instructional support personnel, and administrators. Ms. Ericsson supported collaboration and teamwork, and teachers were able to participate in developing a shared vision and the decision-making process to support student achievement (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016, Thompson et al., 2004; Marks & Printy, 2003). These collaborative efforts found that teacher collaboration in PLCs with strong administrative support served as a predictor for student achievement (Woodland, 2016). This shared responsibility required consistent weekly collaboration where critical instructional discussion occurred, and team decision-making was supported. The teachers and administration were disciplined and committed to the weekly collaborative PLC process and action research where development and knowledge was continuous and shared by the entire school to create results (Thompson et al., 2004). Supporting

the findings of DuFour & DuFour, 2013, in implementing PLCs Jamestown HS developed these setting for shared decision making, dispersed leadership, staff empowerment, and collaboration that demands the attention, energy, effort, and support from the team.

This project's research findings supported the literature by identifying the responsibility of the campus principal in developing the campus culture. It was founded that the principal developed the culture of professional learning communities through the development of a campus-wide mission and vision and consistent collaborative team meeting practices. A central responsibility of the campus principal found in the literature is the coordinating of a campus mission, vision, and goals which Ms. Ericsson developed in collaboration with her team and reviewed annually (Alvoid, 2014). Ms. Ericsson also established a culture of high academic achievement setting high expectations in team goals, held teachers and students accountable for the learning, and built shared values in a trusting environment (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016). Papa et al., (2002) (as cited in Fuller, 2011) found that creating a positive campus culture supports a principal's influence on the people working in their schools. The relationships developed between teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches in weekly PLCs influenced the perceptions of teachers and when all were seen as instructional leaders and knowledgeable, Ms. Ericsson was able to influence practice through "seed" questions and guidance.

This project also found that the PLC offered opportunities for administrators to identify coaching opportunities for teachers and gave them additional avenues to support teacher growth. Also, found at the campus was the importance of celebrations along the path of PLC implementation. As the teams evolved the principal took time in a weekly newsletter and in team meetings to celebrate their collaborative teaming efforts, improved student achievement, and

improved instructional practices. Finally, the shaping of Ms. Ericsson's beliefs and approaches was established in her principal preparation and training and participating in book studies, Solution Tree training, and visiting a high school with full implementation.

The principal observed implementing collaborative PLC practices had a depth of knowledge and experience with these practices. This knowledge was ascertained through book studies, professional development and with firsthand experiences and observations.

The principal valued shared leadership with campus leadership (assistant principals and instructional coaches) and classroom teachers who are the experts in their instructional settings. The principal understood that she was not there to run the meeting but to support the work of the meeting. The principal was skilled in communication understanding how to contribute to the dialogue and coaching opportunities presented in PLC meetings such as asking "seed questions" while members of the PLC have opportunities to share decision making regarding instruction, assessment, differentiation, timelines, and the implementation of campus wide initiatives. Through practices of shared leadership, the principal ensured collaborative team agendas between team leads, instructional support personnel and administrators were being developed. The principal valued team collaboration between all personnel which resulted in team interdependence.

The principal understood her role and the significance of her approach in developing a campus culture beginning with the development a collective campus mission and vision. When implementing PLCs, the principal needed to have a clear plan in order to provide clear and explicit direction to the team. PLC practices contribute to the entire campus culture and are opportunities for teams to demonstrate respect, preparedness, show appreciation for the value of time, have honest conversations, and build united teams. Through such practices, relationships

became stronger within teams and members understood the value and importance of this teaming. In building these relationships, the principal understood and was able to implement practices of action research for assessment and instruction. As teachers continued to participate weekly in the practice of discussing instruction and analyzing assessment strengths and areas of instructional concern emerged leading to conversations regarding ways to address these areas of concerns. These conversations required open and honest conversation along with receptivity by all members to approach this dialogue and input with a growth mindset considering changes in instructional practices that will most benefit students' academic achievement. The principal also understood that in the development of PLCs there was a need for differentiation for teachers through this process and she was able to provide the coaching and support to their teams.

Overall, the principal understood that PLC implementation is a challenging process of growth and development and through this process team members need to be appreciated and recognized for the work accomplished.

5.2.2 What are the actions and decisions of administrators, who support the development of cultures of collaboration, improved instructional practices and student achievement within PLC groups?

One of Ms. Ericsson's initial steps to PLC implementation was developing a master schedule that reflected weekly time for teams to have these meetings. This time needs to be consistent and honored. The research also supports principals being aware of and collaborating with each team to develop a campus culture and teams that prioritize the PLC scheduling and time (Broin & Leaders, 2015).

PLC practices need to be timely, relevant, provide necessary resources, and support a continuous culture of learning and improvement (Buttram, & Farley-Ripple, 2016). During the

PLCs observed the principal along with the leadership team ensured that PLC practices were consistent across the campus focusing on instruction and student learning. Accountability, responsibility, and consistency are further supported through weekly documents of PLC agendas, meeting minutes, and data learning logs.

In developing PLCs, Ms. Ericsson created a system of establishing member roles and responsibilities to ensure the participation and accountability of each team member. The roles observed included facilitator, data gatherer, note taker, and timekeeper; with these varied roles, each member of the team has a sense of ownership and accountability. Broin and Leaders (2015), while conducting a case study with New Leaders to develop policy recommendations, found that creating support roles and promoting differentiated leadership positions to meet school and individual needs will create a campus culture where teacher leadership skills and responsibility will rise. As such, it was a part of the principal's role to participate in these teams with knowledge of the content and instructional practices serving as an instructional leader.

PLC meetings provide opportunities for communication where honest instructional questions, advice, and critical input are provided (Sterrett, 2009). In the PLCs, observed teams discussed curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment data analysis. They identified classrooms where students were performing well and those teachers shared their instructional approaches always being mindful that it was not that one way of teaching was better than the other, but more importantly what is the best way to meet student needs and ensure the learning which will result in improved instructional practices and improved student achievement. In PLC meetings, teachers used the PLC short cycle to identify what needed to be taught (curriculum), to identify how the learning will be measured (assessment), what to do for students who might struggle or master the lesson (differentiation) and discuss specific instructional strategies that

support student academic gains. This observation was a model of systems thinking where bodies of knowledge helped identify patterns of thinking and possibilities for change (Thompson et al., 2004).

To support PLC implementation, Ms. Ericsson provided the team with opportunities for professional development via a campus-wide book study and Solution Tree training. Through PLC meetings, Ms. Ericsson and the C&I team continue to identify areas in need of support and professional development for both PLC teaming and instructional practices. In collaboration, teachers with principals identify areas of student and instructional strengths and needs to create professional development plans to ensure growth (Marks, 2003).

When implementing PLCs, the principal provided professional development regarding PLC implementation and practices to all participating members. She began with the leadership team, instructional coaches, and classroom teachers to build shared knowledge and systems thinking. The principal ensured that clear campus and department goals were established to guide the work of PLCs and daily practice. The principal ensured that the master schedule made time for weekly PLC meetings to occur to provide the opportunity and structures for teams to work together toward goal achievement. In the PLC setting, the principal ensured that members had roles to support the processes and accountability while understanding their role in this setting as an instructional leader to support teams and student achievement. As an instructional leader, the principal was then able to contribute to PLC dialogue and support teams. In PLCs through shared leadership and decision making, the principal empowered team members to develop instructional and assessment timelines. The principal had deep knowledge and understanding of the short cycle of instruction and data analysis. With this knowledge, she had a plan for implementation that supports focused and consistent practices with shared accountability.

The principal implemented clear expectations for communication to support PLC conversations being driven by the teachers, reflective, student-centered, and focused on problem solving to build connections with team members and stronger daily communication. Communication addressed instructional strategies, assessment, curriculum, differentiation resulting in student academic gains.

5.2.3 How does the perceptions of the PLC team members of the administrator influence the PLC practices, collaboration, and effectiveness?

“As the organization’s instructional leader, the principal is the primary source of assistance and monitoring” (Angelle, 2006, as cited in Fuller, 2011, p. 179). It was perceived by the focus group members that the principal’s role was to develop the C&I or support team, to provide training and to be the role model by consistently reiterating in actions and decisions that PLC practices are the expectation and norm of the campus. Team members at Jamestown HS valued the time and consistent PLC practices implemented by Ms. Ericcson. It was also founded that when teachers and instructional support personnel felt the responsibility of a culture of shared leadership with their campus principal and administrative staff, they felt supported and were more willing and able to communicate and collaborate regarding curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment. Focus group members felt that the administrators working with their PLC team had strong content knowledge providing them the ability to serve as instructional leaders. Team members felt that their voices and opinions mattered in decision-making. They also appreciated the support, expertise, and “big picture” insight of administrators and instructional coaches. As the teachers’ immediate supervisor, focus group members believed it was part of the principals’ responsibility to oversee through classroom walkthroughs that the work of PLCs was aligned to instructional practices in the classroom setting.

5.3 Conclusion

PLCs have been in practice for more than 20 years but making the PLC meeting more than a weekly meeting and transforming them into meetings that improve student achievement and instructional practices is the responsibility of the campus principal as noted by Texas Education Agency (TEA) in the Texas Principal Standards (2014). Knowing and understanding the principals' beliefs and approaches in accomplishing this is critical to support implementation. Principals need to develop a campus mission and vision so the team has clear goals and objectives, and PLC practices can support these instructional and student goals. Principals need to understand that PLC implementation provides the opportunity to share the leadership with classroom teachers and instructional coaches as a principal cannot possibly coach every teacher or be in every class setting daily. Principals need to value this collaboration and decision-making approach. This needs to be evident in their actions and decisions by setting weekly time for these meetings, implementing consistent practices, and being instructional leaders in these settings to support each team's transformation into true collaborative teams supporting instructional improvement and student achievement.

5.4 Recommendations for principals implementing PLCs

The following recommendations for practice and policy are based on this study's findings. Principals implementing PLC practices need to develop a culture with a clear mission and vision set for these practices. They need to clearly articulate these expectations to each member of their faculty and each team. Principals need to provide PLC members with training on PLC practices. This can be done via a book study or through training such as Solution Tree training. When the professional development is completed, principals need to continue to support the implementation of these practices through attendance to meetings and acting as instructional

leaders in these meetings. They need to ensure that teams have weekly time to meet. Consistent PLC practices and protocols such as meeting agenda, minute and data analysis templates need to be implemented. Meeting members can be assigned roles to encourage collaboration, accountability, and increased commitment. Meeting discussion needs to focus on curriculum, instructional strategies and the data analysis of assessments and members need to have a sense of ownership in the decision-making process building capacity development and productivity.

Principals wanting to implement PLC practices need to have preparation, training, and knowledge regarding PLC practices. The principal can begin by providing the same training opportunities for their teams to better begin the dialogue and implementation of PLC practices. They need to believe in and value shared leadership, collaboration and shared decision making and be clear about what this looks like in practice (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016, Lambert, 2005). They need to understand their role in building a campus culture conducive to this setting with a collaborative and clear mission, vision, and goals focused on student growth and achievement (Alvoid, 2013, Woodland, 2016). The campus needs to practice action research through review of the short cycle of instruction and data analysis consistently focusing on improved instructional practices and improved student achievement. The principal needs to be skilled in coaching teachers through the implementation of PLCs and with instructional practices to build human capital. During PLC meetings the administrator is listening to the dialogue to identify how to best support teachers. Principals can help teachers to analyze data, develop classroom-level goals, and observe and provide feedback on their instructional practice. (Broin, & Leaders, 2015). Principals coach teachers by asking questions for reflection and analysis of practices and guiding them through the reflective process focused on identifying ways to improve instructional practice and build content and skill knowledge. As instructional leaders'

principals should be collectively focused on adult learning and student learning. (Christiansen, & Robey, 2015). The principal also needs to value relationship building through the development of shared values and the creation of a trusting environment (Buttram & Farley-Ripple, 2016). Principals need to value and celebrate the work of the team throughout the process of PLC implementation.

The principal needs to ensure time is provided for these weekly meetings (Broin & Leaders, 2015). Principals need to implement clear PLC practices and procedures for their teams with commitment to these practices to include meeting agenda, minutes, data analysis tools and member roles while understanding their role as an instructional leader (Broin & Leaders, 2015, Thompson et al., 2004). Through the implementation of PLCs, principals will develop processes of systems thinking regarding instructional strategies, assessment, curriculum, and differentiation (Thompson et al., 2004). Principals need to establish and value communication that is honest, critical, and open to input (Sterret, 2009).

5.5 Recommendations for future research

Suggestions for future research include understanding the development of a campus-wide professional learning community and the varied teams both instructional and staff (such as office, custodians, paraprofessionals) conducting collaborative team meetings and the dynamics between these team meetings in developing the campus-wide PLC. Understanding the impact that a campus wide professional learning community can have on a campus and community and the implications to student achievement is critical to continued PLC improvement practices.

Studies can also continue to support the principals' role by taking the next step of how the principal makes the connection from the PLC meeting to the classroom setting full circle to improve student achievement. Effective PLCs need to have changed classroom instructional

practices for improved student achievement. Identifying how a principal strategically supports aligning these practices is another area of continued study.

Finally, there could be a recommendation for both local district and state policy to require the implementation of professional learning communities. Implementation of collaborative PLC practices have proven to show improved student achievement yet there are still many school systems where these collaborative practices are not occurring, and teachers work in isolation. With district wide implementation this would require professional development and systems for implementation,

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APPENDIX A: PRINCIPAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview description: Interviews will be semi-structured. The interview process will follow the subsequent protocol.

- 1.) Introduction
- 2.) Share the purpose of the study and provide informed consent form to interviewee
- 3.) Provide interviewee with the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns
- 4.) Upon completion of the consent form begin recording and proceed with interview

Interview 1 (Introduction):

Background Information

1. What pseudonym would you like to use for this study?
2. How long have you been working in the field of education?
3. How long have you been working as an administrator?
4. How long have you been working with campus PLCs?
5. Tell me about your experiences as an educator and specifically as an administrator.
6. What roles have you served on campus? How have these roles influenced your role as an administrator?
7. What is your leadership style?
8. What are the campus mission and vision?
9. Which Professional Learning Communities are you currently involved in?
10. Describe the campus PLC process.
11. How would you describe yourself as a leader?
12. How do you think your team would describe you?

Interview 2 (After attending two weeks of PLC meetings)

Sample Questions for Administrative Interviews

Principal Training/Preparation

1. What led you to implement PLCs on the campus?

2. Describe your role as a principal in a PLC.

Implementation of PLC practices

3. What are your expectations for the members of the PLC?
4. What values are critical to a successful PLC?
5. What has been the most challenging aspect of PLC implementation for you, the leadership team and for teachers?
6. How do you support the development of each teachers' instructional skills?
7. Has PLC implementation changed instructional practices? If so, how?

Shared Instructional Leadership and Decision making

8. Describe a time when you shared instructional leadership in your PLC.
9. How did you feel in this setting?
10. What did you learn from this experience?
11. What was the impact on the relationship between you and the team/PLC group?
12. What recommendations would offer to others interested in developing or partaking in PLCs?

Interview 3 (After completion of PLC observations and focus group)

1. To be determined after observations and focus group to clarify and subsequent questions.

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview description: Interviews will be semi-structured. The interview process will follow the subsequent protocol.

- 1.) Collection of background information and PLC Community Continuum Survey
- 2.) Introduction
- 3.) Share the purpose of the study and provide informed consent form to interviewees.
- 4.) Provide interviewees with the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns
- 5.) Upon completion of the consent form begin recording and proceed with interview

Background Information

1. What pseudonym would you like to use for this study?
2. Tell me about your experiences as an educator.
3. How long have you been working in the field of education?
4. What roles do you serve in the PLC?

Sample Questions for Teacher & Instructional Leadership Team Focus Group

1. What is the mission and vision for your campus?
2. What is the purpose of the PLC?
3. How would you describe the culture of the PLC?
4. Describe a PLC meeting process from preparation to during and after the meeting.
5. Do PLCs influence/change instructional practices? If so, how?
6. Do PLCs address individual teacher concerns and development?
7. What are the roles you have contributed to the PLC?
8. What is the role of the principal in this process?
9. What is the most challenging aspect of PLC implementation?
10. What is an instructional leader?
11. What is the role of an instructional leader in a PLC?
12. What have you learned from the PLC implementation process?
13. Describe the relationships between the PLC participants?

14. Is there any specific contribution from your principal in the PLC process that has stood out for you?

APPENDIX C: SURVEY
The Professional Learning Community Continuum School

Date _____

| Aspect | Novice | Emerging | Developing | Sustaining |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| Shared Values | Team members have not yet created team expectations, norms, and commitments for team collaboration. | Initially the team came to consensus about norms, expectations, and commitments. These are not monitored by the group. | The team lead will refer to norms, expectations, and commitments when they are broken, forgotten, or dismissed by members. | Members will refer to the norms, expectations, and commitments when they are broken, forgotten, or dismissed. |
| Trust Building around the Work | Teachers would rather not spend time with each other or experience conflict when they do. | Teachers attend collaboration meetings with reluctance or resistance because the time is perceived as irrelevant and wasted. | Team members value collaboration but are reluctant to raise concerns and questions about difficult issues. Some team members do not demonstrated responsibility for actions. | Teachers express differing points of view with respect but come to agreement about what is best for students. All members share responsibility for the success of team meetings and stay accountable. |
| Accountability for Administrators | Administrators ensure the team is meeting as expected. Power is a source of controversy and friction. | Administrators drop in to monitor and/or encourage the work. | Administrators regularly attend PLC meetings and provide relevant coaching and support. | Administrators are seen as part of the team |
| Structures and Systems | Time is set for collaborative time but often gets canceled or shortened due to interferences. There is no clear team facilitator. | Time is set. Teams use it to do business (e.g., plan a parent night) or vent about issues (e.g., students, admin, families). The facilitator lacks the skills to run an effect | Meeting time is used to analyze student learning and improve practice by using protocols and processes. The facilitator runs effective meetings by leading a cohesive team. | Data driven meeting time is used with purpose and any team member can lead the discussion using common protocols and processes. |

| | | | | |
|--|--|------------------------|--|--|
| | | collaborative meeting. | | |
|--|--|------------------------|--|--|

Based on “About PLCs” from ALL THINGS PLC

| | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| Focus on Learning | <p>Teachers believe student learning is largely impacted by factors out of their control.</p> <p>Teachers plan in isolation.</p> <p>Teachers believe they know what they’re doing and should be left alone.</p> | <p>Team members have a general commitment to improving test scores.</p> <p>Teachers meet and discuss teaching and learning during meetings, but individual practice is generally, not impacted.</p> <p>Teachers focus on planning curriculum and materials but are resistant to look at issues in delivery.</p> | <p>Team members have a clear and compelling vision of what students need for all students to learn.</p> <p>The team collaboratively monitors student learning at meetings.</p> <p>Teachers are hesitant to analyze student learning gaps with the team and gain insights from colleagues.</p> | <p>Collaborative time is spent on how to address interventions and extensions for students at both ends of the spectrum.</p> <p>Team members aggressively monitor student learning independently throughout the week and can report back to the team about their formative data analysis.</p> <p>Teachers are eager to discuss teaching gaps with their team based on student learning data.</p> |
| Collective Inquiry into Best Practice and Current Reality | <p>Teachers do not use data to determine current levels of learning. They are reluctant to share ideas about teaching and learning.</p> | <p>Teachers enjoy sharing strategies with each other. There is no accountability or discussion of how that sharing will impact individual practice.</p> | <p>After analyzing data and determining learning gaps, teachers build consensus on best practices for student learning despite individual opinions and preferences.</p> | <p>Team members develop new skills and strengths which shifts attitudes, beliefs, and habits. School culture also shifts.</p> |
| Action Oriented: Learning by Doing | <p>Teachers don’t see themselves as learners.</p> | <p>Teachers show interest in new ideas, but little planning is spent on implementation of new ideas.</p> | <p>Teachers attempt to implement new ideas but do not persevere through the “implementation</p> | <p>Members quickly implement actions discussed in collaborative meetings. They are willing to practice</p> |

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|--|
| | | | gap” and drop the new practice. | their new learning in front of their peers. |
| Commitment to Continuous Improvement | Teachers have a curricular plan and deliver it with little modifications despite student learning struggles. | Teachers are reluctant to engage in a cycle of inquiry—gather evidence, address weaknesses in learning, implement new strategies, analyze the impact, and apply new knowledge—because they have too much to cover and don’t want to “disrupt” their teaching. | A solid cycle of inquiry becomes second nature for team members—gather evidence, address weaknesses in learning, implement new strategies, analyze the impact, and apply new knowledge. | Teachers commit to improve practice through a long- term process of change. Team members share the responsibility of change and accept help from each other. |
| Results Oriented | Data is not used during collaborative meetings to determine the effectiveness of instruction. | The team uses infrequent common assessments to determine how students are learning. Periodic plans are made to deliver interventions and extensions for students. | The team continues to develop measurable short- and long-term goals for learning. Teams have a series of common formative assessments administered throughout the year to gather evidence of learning. Interventions and extensions are created. | The team uses a variety of data (CFAs, benchmarks, lesson reflection, aggressive monitoring during student work time, student work samples, peer observations, feedback from observations) to monitor and improve student learning outcomes throughout the year. |

Created by Solution Tree: ALLTHINGSPLC based on DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2006). [Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work™](#), pp. 2–4.

VITA

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